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**CAPTAIN
COLDGRIP**

**THE SPORT
DETECTIVE**

OR,
The New York Spotter in Colorado.

BY CAPT. HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "HERCULES GOLDSPUR," "FLASH
DAN," "DENVER DUKE," "COOL CON-
RAD," "KEEN KENNARD," "DES-
PERATE DOZEN," "MAJOR
BLISTER," ETC.

CHAPTER I.
THE TWO TELEGRAMS.

It had been snowing twenty-four hours and the mountain trails and the cabin roofs had a heavy coating of white.

A cold wind swept the streets of Alabaster City, on the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, and kept its citizens indoors.

In consequence of this detention the numerous gambling-dens were in full blast, and the rough inhabitants of Alabaster were trying to rob each other over the monte tables and the keno counters.

The night train from the East was late, and the young telegraph operator who sat alone at his instrument in the close little room at the

THIS MAN APPEARED LIKE A NEW CREATION TO THE ASTONISHED OPERATOR.

depot heard the wind without and thought of drifts and danger.

It had not snowed much since sundown, and at nine o'clock the flakes were scattering, for the cloudy canopy had parted, and everywhere brilliant stars were becoming visible.

All at once a sudden ticking caused the operator to lean forward.

Alabaster City had been called, and the next minute he was taking off a telegram from Salt Lake.

"Something's in the wind," he said as he wrote it down. "This dispatch means a great deal more than it says, but that is none of my business." And when the last sentence had been successfully caught, he looked at his work and read as follows:

"SALT LAKE CITY.

"TO RICHARD REDHILT,

Gold Eye, via Alabaster City.

"The storm signal is up and you want to look out. The wind is from the east and threatens a cyclone. The game must not be lost, and the new hand must be blocked at all hazards. Say the word and I will come. The old motto must not be forgotten now. Answer."

The telegram from the capital of Mormonism was signed "Monteban."

"I know what to do," said the operator. "I have orders to get Richard Redhilt's dispatches to him as soon as possible. This one is important and he ought to have it, but I will wait till my assistant comes. He is due now."

The young telegrapher folded the dispatch and put it in a leathern pocketbook on the inside of his coat. Then he began to wait for a boy whose duty it was to come to the office at half-past nine and assist him until the trains had passed.

While he waited the little instrument clicked again.

"This time the far East talks," laughed the telegrapher, and then to his great astonishment he began to take off another telegram for the same person who had received the first.

It ran thus:

"NEW YORK, N. Y.

"TO RICHARD REDHILT,

Gold Eye, via Alabaster City, Col.

"You don't want to sleep a moment from now on. Eternal vigilance is the price of success. The victory depends on you. A cool hand will play cold decks. The tiger is merciless; remember this! Say the word, and I will come. Answer."

"DIAMOND."

The operator laid the two dispatches side by side. They interested him. He had had some strange experiences as a telegrapher, but none like this.

Within ten minutes the East and the West had spoken to the same man and in the same strain. There was something in the wind; a desperate game of some kind was being played, and this Richard Redhilt, of Gold Eye—was he serving two masters, one in Salt Lake City and another in New York?

Gold Eye was a mountain camp, thirty miles from Alabaster City. It had a reputation for desperateness that few of the Colorado towns possessed.

It was almost buried among mountains that were said to teem with gold, but somehow or other there were no open mines about Gold Eye.

Two months prior to the opening of our romance, an Indian, dressed in citizen's clothes, stalked into the telegraph-office at Alabaster and told the operator that if any messages came for Richard Redhilt, of Gold Eye, they should be brought to him (the Indian) at Royal Ralph's Ranch, or Hotel, where he would be found at all hours.

The operator promised to remember this, and he did so.

For two months the Indian, who was silent and well-behaved, waited for dispatches that showed no signs of coming. He took part in the monte game that was played continuously at Royal Ralph's, and never went to the railroad. He was trusting the young man on duty there.

But the messages had come at last, one from Mormondom and one from New York.

The operator folded them together, put them into an envelope which he sealed and addressed to Richard Redhilt, and turned to see his assistant enter the room.

"Keep shop till I come back. I've got a bit o' business at Royal Ralph's," he said, and then put on a heavy coat, for the wind was still holding carnival in the street, and went out.

He went straight to the monte ranch and hotel, and as if he knew where to find the Indian, he did not stop until he had reached a room well filled with tobacco-smoke and rough-looking men.

Several monte games were at their height, and Royal Ralph who presided at the main table looked confident and happy.

Nobody seemed to see the operator who glided noiselessly into the room, and he tried to single out the Indian without asking anybody for him.

Was there something in the young telegrapher's eye that told a deep-eyed and dark-faced individual at one of the tables that he had important dispatches on his person? This man had high cheek-bones and straight wiry black hair,

and his only name to the toughs of Alabaster was Injun Nick.

He exhibited no start when he saw the telegrapher, but he seemed to know that he was the man sought by the wandering eyes.

For once he had not been playing; therefore, he had to leave no game when he went forward and joined the youth whose eyes twinkled the moment they saw him.

"How would you like to go to Gold Eye tonight?" asked the operator.

"Injun Nick is always ready. Has the telegraph talked to my master?"

"I have two dispatches for Richard Redhilt," and the operator began to unbutton his coat when the dark hand of the Indian touched his arm:

"Not here!" he said, scarcely moving his lips. The two went into a room that adjoined the monte den, and the red-skin waited quietly for the production of the telegrams.

For all this, the telegrapher could see that he was eager to clutch the messages, and the quickness with which his fingers closed on the envelope told that inwardly he was excited.

"Richard Redhilt wants those messages at once, but I need not tell you that," said the operator.

"Injun Nick knows that," was the reply, as the eyes of the red-skin glittered. "The wind cannot take the talkin'-papers to him quicker than the Injun will."

"You'll have to move almighty fast then, for the wind is lively outside," smiled the youth.

"Injun Nick can beat a cyclone!"

A minute later the young operator was going back to his office.

"If Richard Redhilt and that Indian are in league, they will win the game whatever it is," he said. "I wouldn't incur that red-skin's hatred for all Colorado. He has been quiet enough here, but on the trail or in a game where human life is the stake, I'll bet my life he is a holy terror."

Meanwhile, Injun Nick had concealed the dispatches on his person, and left the ranch without returning to the monte gamblers. He did not have to tell them that he had a message for a man in Gold Eye, thirty miles away—a message that had to be delivered yet that night, and one for which he had waited two solid months in Alabaster City.

A gleam of triumph lit up the depths of his dark eyes when he glided from the hotel. He seemed glad that his long vigil had ended; he liked the mountains and the trail; life in Alabaster, although quite exciting, was too dull for him. Indian-like, he hated the sound of the locomotive.

"The eagle is free once more," he said to himself, while he walked rapidly toward a long, low building in the rear of Royal Ralph's Ranch. "Injun Nick is going away from the sound of the white man's iron horses. Where his master is they are never heard. He has the talking-papers at last. Richard's eyes will dance when Injun Nick shows them to him. Mebbe there will be fast work for the red-skin who has waited here so long."

He entered the long building just mentioned, and found in it a horse, which he saddled in a jiffy, and led into the starlight that now fell upon Alabaster.

There was an affinity between man and horse; the animal rubbed his nose against the Indian's cheek, and the red-skin stroked his neck. They were old companions.

The snow on the ground was almost a foot deep, and glittered in the starlight like a great diamond-field. It was light and fresh, and smothered the sounds of feet.

Injun Nick looked toward the hotel, and saw the lighted windows of the monte room, then, without touching the stirrup that dangled below the saddle, he seated himself firmly on the steed's back, and gave the signal for the journey.

The wind blew against his face and parted his wiry hair. The front of his hat, whose band was a rattlesnake's skin, blew back as he rode, but he went down the street with a gleam of wild laughter in his eyes, and in a moment, as it were, had left Alabaster City behind.

The dispatches were on their way to Richard Redhilt, of Gold Eye, and a more trusty messenger had never filled a saddle.

The Indian's ride was a silent one. The snow lay unbroken ahead and his horse's hoofs did not send out any sound.

He knew the way. On the darkest night he could have found his road from Alabaster to Gold Eye. In the service of Richard Redhilt he had traveled it before.

He did not know what had happened in Alabaster City.

Injun Nick had hardly left the "city" when a man entered the telegraph office without ceremony.

He was considerably above the medium height and splendidly formed in every way that goes to make a perfect specimen of manhood. His face was adorned with a black mustache that curled slightly at the ends, his eyes were black and piercing, and his shoulders were broad and strong.

About his waist he wore a dark red sash that

had gold fringe at the ends which hung along his left leg; his open jacket had two rows of gold buttons, and his wide brimmed hat had a golden band almost three fingers wide.

This man appeared like a new creation to the astonished operator, who had expected no such visitor. He was certain that he had never come to Alabaster before.

"Good-night, sir," said the visitor to the telegrapher. "I'm here on business. Didn't you take off a message a while ago?"

This was the height of impudence. Didn't the man in gold know that the rules of the company forbid an answer to that question?

"What if I did?" said the operator. "You know—"

"Yes, I know the rules," was the interruption. "I'm sorry that I want you to break them, but you must do it."

"I can't."

"Can't, do you say, my boy?" and the speaker reached the operator's chair with a single stride and one of his hands fell heavily upon his shoulder. "Come!" he went on. "I want you to play fair with me. You keep copies of all your telegrams. I want the one that came to-night for Richard Redhilt, of Gold Eye."

"Which one?"

The young operator, carried away by the demand, had forgotten himself.

"Ah! there were two, were there? Then I'll take them both," laughed the man. "Be quick about it! They are in the drawer there. Unlock it and hand them over. Two telegrams, eh? By Jove! Things are getting interesting."

The operator did not stir.

"What! ain't you going to comply with my demand?" cried the man of gold. "I don't want to proceed to violence, but if the dispatches are not produced immediately the company will have to look for a new operator at Alabaster!"

The threat in the last sentence was enough; the drawer was opened and the hand of the robber pounced upon the two telegrams which were visible.

"Thank you!" he said, to the operator. "Ha! I see! One from Mormondom and one from Gotham. Got here same night, eh?"

"Not ten minutes apart," answered the telegrapher.

"Did you deliver the originals to the Indian at Royal Ralph's Ranch?"

"I did."

The man in gold turned toward the door, and grated:

"By heavens! I must catch that red hound!"

CHAPTER II.

RICHARD REDHILT'S SURPRISE.

"INJUN NICK has been sixty days at Alabaster, an' no message yet. Mebbe the dogs have lost the scent."

These words were spoken by a man who stood in a certain cabin thirty miles from the scene of the events narrated in the chapter just ended. This cabin, not unlike the thousands to be found in the gold and silver camps of the far West, stood in the center of Gold Eye, a place well known in more ways than one throughout the wild district that takes in Leadville and Denver.

In person the speaker was tall and had a magnificent physique. His age could not be told by observation, for the upper part of his face was covered by a black mask which fitted close, like rubber. A pair of dark eyes looked through the openings made for them, the mouth was well formed and indicative of determination. There was no mustache as the mask would have interfered with it.

It was about ten o'clock and the same night that witnessed the cool theft of the dispatches at Alabaster City thirty miles away. The man in the cabin, though a rough and an adventurer, as his dress and surroundings indicated, had a voice of singular sweetness, as if it had not always been heard lordling it over the rough denizens of the gold camps, or at play in the monte dens.

"No," he went on, "Injun Nick has not come back. He is goin' to obey orders—remain at his post until recalled. If we can keep the dogs from the trail three months longer the game will be ours. It looks like we would do it. Diamond Dan ought to report progress anyhow. A word would do it. He could telegraph 'All is well' or somethin' of that sort. And the Mormon Spider he could answer my last proposition, but neither of them care to speak. Well, never mind. I am in a position to face them both an' demand terms."

Gold Eye had a mystery and we have just seen it.

This man with the black mask was the strangest puzzle a gold-camp ever had. He was its boss, and not one of its inhabitants had ever seen his face.

They called him Richard Redhilt, because he had told them that was his name. Two years before he had ridden unattended into camp with the black mask on, and had told the Colorado toughs that he had come to stay for an indefinite period.

One by one he selected a set of men whom he bound to him with an oath too horrible to transcribe here. He swore them for an emergency

which he said might never come. They were to obey him in every particular; the lifting of his hand might mean that a life had to be taken, or that Gold Eye should be given to the flames.

There was a strange fascination about this unknown man who persisted in hiding his face even from his own followers? One year went by with his antecedents as unknown as ever.

At the end of that time an Indian came to Gold Eye. The man in the mask and the red-skin in civilized garments had met before, for the first night after the latter's arrival found him in Richard Redhilt's cabin. This discovery excited Gold Eye; the men who had taken the unknown's oath wondered if this Indian was to be added to the league.

It is said that one of the most inquisitive, a man called Hustling Hank, listened at the door of the shanty, that he had heard the twain talking about New York, as if they knew it as well as Richard Redhilt knew the mountains that hemmed in the little camp.

At any rate, Hustling Hank disappeared the night after his exploit, and up to the opening of our story, his pards had not seen him.

It was noticed that the Indian had long hands that were as soft as velvet, and in a trial of strength at the main ranch of the camp, it was discovered that he had a grip like an iron vise.

Whether Hustling Hank had paid dearly for his eavesdropping propensities, or whether Redhilt had sent him away, certain it was that his departure was still a mystery, but not as great a one as Richard himself.

Gold Eye looked askance at Injun Nick for many months. The men who did not like Indians at all had no love for this one. He kept his own counsels and disturbed no one; he had money and used it. Play was a passion with him, and by and by the toughs of Gold Eye got to fleeing him at the monte games.

They liked to beat the Indian, but did not care about associating with him. He was always silent, and on this account, they said, dangerous, but he was Richard Redhilt's pard, and they had to endure him.

It was true, whether Hustling Hank had discovered it or not, that the man in the mask and the Indian had talked about New York. They talked often about the great city far away on the eastern seaboard, and they often rather broadly hinted about a crime and a scheme, about a flight and a sensation, strange things to talk about in a cabin buried among the gold mountains of Colorado.

Let us go back to the night of wind and snow, to the mysterious man of Gold Eye alone in the shanty, with the name of his Indian pard on his lips.

The light of the fire on the stone hearth and the beams of the lamp on the rough table before him glowed his glittering eyes full of triumph.

It had snowed all day in Gold Eye and its winding streets had a soft carpet of fleecy white. The snow lay on the narrow sill of Richard Redhilt's one window; it had ceased to fall now and the sky was strewn with stars again.

"I'm gettin' tired of this," he said impetuously. "I wish some person would come to give me something to do. By Jehu! I would not care if it was one of the trail dogs of the East! anything for excitement. I would curse the telegram that told me that things war to drift on thus to the end. I want work! I had better times in New York than this. I had Diamond Dan and the boys to help make life lively; but hyer—hyer—"

He stopped suddenly and sprung toward the door.

Above the wind that was sporting among the fifty cabins of Gold Eye he had heard the neigh of a horse.

Had Injun Nick come at last from his two months' waiting and watching at Alabaster?

The man in the mask laid his hand on the latch of the door, and at the same time drew a revolver that clicked as the lamplight caught the polished barrel.

"Hello in there!" was called from the outside, and the door opened immediately.

With the opening of the door the light fell upon the snow, and upon more than that.

A horse had halted before Richard Redhilt's cabin, and in the saddle sat one of the most beautiful young girls he had ever seen.

With a cry of profound astonishment the masked man had cleared the threshold.

"Is this Gold Eye?" asked the person in the saddle.

"This is no place else," was the quick response. "You are cold. Let me help you from the saddle."

"Cold? Yes, I am cold, but what of that? I can endure a great deal. I have promised to endure everything if necessary. If this is Gold Eye it is the place I started out to find."

"Are you alone?"

"I am now. I was not alone when I left Denver."

"Denver?" repeated Richard Redhilt, amazed.

"Have you come all the way from Denver on horseback?"

"Every mile," was the answer.

By this time the boss of the gold camp had lifted the young girl from the saddle, and the

next moment she had passed the threshold of his cabin.

Then, for the first time, she saw the close-fitting mask, for the lamplight fell full upon the desperado's face.

With a light cry she recoiled, her eyes staring at the mystery, and a shudder passing over her frame.

"Do I look like his Satanic Majesty to you?" asked Redhilt, deftly placing himself between his visitor and the door.

"I do not know what you are like," was the confused reply. "I did not know Gold Eye had a person like you."

The masked man laughed.

"I thought all Colorado knew that Richard Redhilt was boss of Gold Eye."

"Richard Redhilt! Is that your name?"

"It is."

The girl looked strangely at the man.

"Have you ever seen me before?" he asked, his lips curling with a smile.

"I cannot say. I do not know what you look like with that mask on. You will not take it off, I suppose?"

"Not to-night, my girl," answered Redhilt. "Here! sit down and get warmed through. From Denver on horseback! You said you were not alone a short time ago."

"That is true," and the young beauty took off her heavy hood and displayed to the mountain sport a wealth of the glossiest chestnut hair. "I left Denver with a man whom I hired to guide me to Gold Eye. I paid him well to guide me the whole distance, and he promised to do so."

"But he did not, the villain! You can't trust all these fellows who hold up their hands an' swear! Your guide deserted you, eh?"

"Yes. He was afraid to enter Gold Eye, he said."

"Afraid?" echoed the mask. "Then he must have had enemies here."

"He guided me well until we reached the summit from which we could see the lights of the camp," the girl went on. "Then he touched my arm and told me that he could go no further—that he dared not go down into Gold Eye, where he was once known as Hustling Hank."

Redhilt started.

"He told you this? The coward!" he exclaimed. "Hustling Hank, eh? There used to be a fellow of that name in Gold Eye. He was treacherous, mean, good-for-nothin'. It is a wonder that he brought you as far as he did."

"Then I am to be thankful," said the girl with a smile. "He offered me no indignity during the journey, though. Gold Eye is a long distance from Denver."

She made the last remark, looking thoughtfully into the fire before her, as she put forward her shapely hands and enjoyed the warmth.

Richard Redhilt was eying her like a hawk, but not exactly with the hawk's nature, perhaps.

"Hyer's a gold mine—a whole diamond field dropped from the night," he said to himself. "Don't I know this beauty, though? Any one who ever knew her mother as I did would know her. I've heard o' fellows fallin' afoul o' fortunes, but I never knew it to happen till now. I'm the only person in camp who knows that this bonanza is hyer. The secret must be kept; at all hazards it must be guarded."

He went forward and seated himself at the girl's side. The fire-light fell upon both; it showed the girl the shapely face and piercing black eyes of Richard Redhilt, and brought out her bewitching beauty as the chilled blood warmed again under the influence of the heat.

"You must have a powerful errand hyer," he said. "I did not look for angels in Gold Eye to-night. What is your name?"

"For the present it is Bertha," was the reply.

"Yes, my errand here is a powerful one." And the eyes of the girl caught Richard Redhilt's at that moment, and held them in thrall as it were.

"You are thinking that no every-day mission would prompt me to dare the danger of a winter trip on horseback from Denver to Gold Eye. You are right. I came here for vengeance!"

The man in the mask seemed to have prepared himself for this climax.

"I could have guessed this the moment I saw you, my stiletto princess," he said under his breath, and then he leaned toward the girl and laughed.

"And pray, who is it you want to strike?"

The next instant the beautiful creature was on her feet.

"The man who orphaned me!" she cried in startling tones. "I would go to the end of the world to find him. I would walk bare-footed over the pavements of perdition to carry out the oath registered at the bar of heaven! I have come two thousand miles nerved for this purpose. Oh! you may sit there and look, and wonder if I am not mad. I have suffered enough, young as I am, to throw my mind from its balance. Before to-morrow night I will know whether Gold Eye holds this fiend who put the dagger of vengeance into my hand."

"I know all hyer," said Richard Redhilt with a smile. "Who is this man?"

The girl darted forward and her hand fell upon his arm.

"Where he did his work he was known as the

Broadway Centipede. Tell me! Is this man in camp?"

"We will see what to-morrow tells. So it happened in New York?"

"Yes—two years ago. Don't ask me for the story of the crime. The man first—the story afterward!"

"Jupiter Pluvius!" exclaimed Richard Redhilt. "A tigress from Gotham!"

CHAPTER III.

A COOL MAN ON DECK.

Was this young girl with the deep-blue eyes and chestnut hair the person referred to in the two singular dispatches received at Alabaster City for the masked boss of the gold diggings?

Could she be the "cyclone from the East," and if she was, should Richard Redhilt, cool, brave and desperate, fear her hand?

During the remainder of that night Bertha slept on a cot in the masked man's cabin, for the most part watched closely by its dark-skinned owner who could not recover from the surprise caused by her visit.

When she was sound asleep Redhilt stole from the shanty and led her horse away. Once more the sky had become clouded and a satisfied smile curled the sport's lips when several snowflakes fell upon his hands.

He led the horse into the mountains and did not stop until he was nearly two miles from Gold Eye and in the depths of a canyon to which few men ever went.

Then Richard Redhilt unsaddled the animal and threw the trappings into a dark opening in the canyon wall. The next minute he stood beside the horse with a heavy revolver in his hand.

All at once he raised the weapon and clapped it against the horse's head. There was a faint flash and a dull report, and the animal staggered away to drop dead at the foot of the rocky wall.

"I'm fixin' things, ain't I?" laughed the boss of Gold Eye. "I'm playin' a game I never thought of at sundown, but I know how, ha, ha! I'll go back now an' take care of the gold mine that came to camp to-night."

He went back through the snow, which was rapidly obliterating the trail he had made.

The girl from New York was still asleep. There was nothing to indicate that her sleep had been broken during his absence, and he looked at her triumphantly for he alone held the secret of her arrival in camp.

Hustling Hank, the man who had guided her to within sight of Gold Eye, had gone back, and in Denver and elsewhere he was likely to forget the beautiful avenger.

The morning came, showing the mountain white. The snow had completely covered all trails, and when Redhilt looked at the guest sleeping soundly a gleam in his eyes told that he considered his victory complete.

Her sleep was long and serene; the horseback ride over the mountains had greatly fatigued her; but, at last her eyes unclosed and became fixed on the man in the mask.

"This is the new day!" she exclaimed. "You will tell me now, won't you?"

"Tell you what?"

"Whether the man I seek is in Gold Eye," cried the impatient girl. "I told you last night that I am on the trail of vengeance. I want a man known to me as the Broadway Centipede. His other name—he may have several for aught I know—is Robert Roy. Is he here?"

"I cannot say now," was the wary answer.

"These western camps are made up of queer characters, many of whom have double lives. If you want to find this man you must work slowly, or through some one."

"Will you help me?" asked Bertha, eagerly.

"Will you be my friend and help me search this camp? I don't ask you to strike for me—not that! I will do that myself. The oath I have taken has given me muscles of wire, and I will not fail when I have found this king of villains. This man, Robert Roy, is about your size; he has dark eyes, and at the time he did the foul deed that makes me hate him, he had short hair, for he had not been three months from Sing Sing, it is said. He has a scar—a livid scar on his left cheek. One end of it touched his eye. It is said to have been given him by a red-hot iron thrown at him by a fellow prisoner. That scar which cannot be removed ought to betray him. Is there such a man in Gold Eye?"

Richard Redhilt slowly shook his head.

"We received a dozen new citizens the other day," he replied. "I have not seen any of them."

"But I was told that—"

The girl stopped as if she had caught the eager expression in the desperado's eyes.

"You were told by somebody that you'd be likely to find your man here, eh?" said Richard.

"Yes."

"Who told you this?"

"Hustling Hank."

"The liar of the camp," laughed the masked sport. "I am sorry that this man deluded you in this way. He knew that he was not wanted here, an' when he left you he saved himself a punishment that has waited a long time for him. We will look for this man with the livid

scar. The search must be secretly conducted. Yes, I will turn Gold Eye upside down for him, an' all on the quiet, too."

"You are very kind," said the girl. "I did not expect to find a friend here."

"You will remain where you are for the present. Gold Eye does not know of your arrival, an' it need not find out. The cabin next to mine on the right belongs to a friend who is absent. An underground way connects them. You shall occupy his shanty, an' Gold Eye will be none the wiser for your visit. If you have no objection we'll inspect the cabin."

The girl did not remonstrate, and Richard Redhilt disclosed a trap-door, beneath which was visible the top of a flight of steps. The two went down together, and after a short walk through the darkness emerged into the light of another cabin similar to the one just left.

"I will make a fire here," said the man. "The camp will think that my friend has returned, or that I am expecting him," and in a little while the new cabin was as comfortable as the one just left.

Bertha the beautiful avenger was alone again. "Who is this strange man who is so ready to befriend me?" she asked herself when the trap had closed upon the magnificent figure of Richard Redhilt. "There is a mystery about him, for the mask that conceals one-half of his face makes him a human puzzle. Hustling Hank did not once mention him, and yet he must have known that he was boss here. I am here to find the Broadway Centipede. I must let nothing take the great mission from my mind—not for a moment. When I have finished my work, I can go back, and every dollar of my wealth I will throw to the winds. It tempted the gold league of New York; it nerved the merciless hand of this Robert Roy, and it indirectly put me upon the path of vengeance—my goal the heart of the fiend who made me an orphan!"

With his ear glued to the under side of the trap door, Richard Redhilt heard every word. His face, as much of it as the somber mask did not conceal, grew demoniac in expression; his eyes flashed:

"I know the whole game!" he said. "You will have a time finding the heart of this Broadway Centipede, my city serpent, an' yet it is nearer than you think. What would Diamond Dan say if he knew you war hyer? an' the Mormon Spider!—by Jupiter! he'd jump out o' his skin!"

Richard Redhilt went back to his own cabin.

Outside the morning light was everywhere, and Gold Eye was astir.

Several persons saw smoke issuing from the rude chimney of the shanty next to Richard's, but not one suspected that it had a tenant, much less that that tenant was a beautiful girl of nineteen, a veritable angel for desperate Gold Eye to contain.

Their mental question was: Has Injun Nick come back?

No, the silent copper-colored citizen of the camp had not returned. He had been gone two months, and the pards of Gold Eye had not discovered that he was no further off than Alabaster City, playing at the monte tables and waiting for dispatches for his master.

Suddenly one of the toughs of Gold Eye gave vent to an exclamation of surprise and stopped in the snow.

A man on horseback had appeared, a handsome fellow, who sat the steed like a Centaur. He wore a broad-brimmed hat with a wide gold band, a heavy jacket with two rows of gold buttons, and a sash of dark red with a gold fringe.

This mounted Apollo had appeared suddenly to his discoverer. He rode forward with the gaze of the startled man fastened upon him, and when at his side he leaned over and said with a laugh:

"Strike me off a dozen photographs. I guess you've got me solid, pard. I am Captain Coldgrip. If I don't call for the pictures in person, send 'em to Sawdust City."

By this time the stranger was gone, riding away with a laugh on his lips, and stared at by the Gold Eye rough who could not find his tongue.

Captain Coldgrip seemed to know where to find the boss of the camp for he drew rein in front of Richard Redhilt's door and leaned toward it with a triumphant glitter in his very dark eyes.

At the first stroke of the knuckles Redhilt sprang forward and opened the door. He had not heard Captain Coldgrip ride up, for the snow, and to see a person of the description given in front of his cabin was as if he had been called upon to confront the prince of darkness.

"Didn't look for me, eh?" exclaimed Coldgrip, and before Redhilt could speak the captain had landed in the center of the little room and was confronting him.

The boss of Gold Eye recoiled. Here was an example of coolness and bravado that nearly took his breath away.

"No, I did not look for you," he retorted, glaring tigerishly at the captain. "Who are you, anyway?"

"Captain Coldgrip, the man you don't want to see just now," was the prompt answer.

"Were you thinking, Richard Redhilt, as you call yourself here, that the dogs had lost the scent? Gold Eye isn't New York, but it is your kingdom, I hear. I am one of the dogs that lost the scent, but only for a time. What will you give me for two telegrams that were intended for you?"

Redhilt uttered a low, vicious oath and started toward the cool blade who stepped back and suddenly threw up a revolver.

"If you had got them they would have put you on your guard—they would have told you that I had found the lost trail," he went on, talking coolly over the leveled weapon. "What do you wear that mask for? Is it to hide the shiny scar made by a mad fellow-prisoner in Sing Sing?"

The boss of Gold Eye seemed to writhe under the question.

"Let me see. Two years and a few days have passed since that night. One of the others still remains in New York, and the third is in the capital of Mormondom. You see, I have found the principal first; the accomplices, the plotters, I will get by and by. Richard Redhilt, you will obey me in everything. We are going to Alabaster City. Not a sign, not a word to the men you have gathered about you in Gold Eye. I am not obliged to take you back alive."

Richard Redhilt was a statue of amazement before the man who had fallen with the suddenness of a thunderbolt upon Gold Eye.

The whole affair seemed a wild dream. It could not be reality, and yet the handsome giant before him did not look like the unsubstantial creation of a vision.

Suddenly a thought—an interrogative—flashed across his mind.

If this Captain Coldgrip had taken possession of his dispatches, where was Injun Nick? Had the red-skin slept on his post?

"You need not expect your red fox, Richard," said Captain Coldgrip, as if he had read the cornered desperado's thoughts. "Injun Nick did his duty. He carried out your instructions in all save one thing—he did not bring you telegrams."

"Then, you—"

"Yes, I kept the Injun back," was the interruption. "He had a good horse, but mine was better. You set a good man on guard, Richard; I did not know for certain who this Injun Nick was until I grappled him. Why, I've seen him play with cannon-balls in the New York circus ring!"

A faint smile appeared at the corners of Redhilt's mouth.

"Now," continued Captain Coldgrip, "we will go to your stables. Gold Eye may look on amazed, but if a hand is raised to rescue you, I'll drop you dead in the snow. Remember!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE CAPTAIN WINS.

REDHILT made no reply to the threat and warning.

The man with the gold buttons opened the door, and the twain walked from the cabin.

Captain Coldgrip's horse stood where he had left him, and his left hand caught the bridle-rein while the right clutched the butt of a heavy silver-mounted six-shooter.

Already more than a dozen men with dark skins were looking at the pair. The man who had seen the captain ride into camp had spread the report, and this, with the strange horse waiting for his rider at Richard Redhilt's door, was enough to collect a desperate crowd.

Captain Coldgrip glanced from his prisoner to the silent group a few yards away. He read the thoughts of all, and saw the lowering brows, the clinched hands and flashing eyes.

The lifting of Redhilt's hand, a word from his tongue, would precipitate a rescue, and the bloodiest time Gold Eye had ever seen. The men were ready for anything; the coolness of this handsome, gold-laced sport was a thorn in the flesh.

The masked man of the camp did not give the signal, but all at once a stalwart fellow with a cocked revolver in each hand, took a step forward.

"We'd like ter know about this," he said to Captain Coldgrip. "This ar' a game thet has never been played in Gold Eye."

Captain Coldgrip gave the speaker a look which should have settled him.

"It means that Richard Redhilt is my prisoner for the present," he said. "It is my duty to take him from this camp, an' that duty shall be performed. We are going now to the stables."

"But why is he your prisoner?" persisted the big man in the snow, with the tigerish crowd at his back eager, if not actually spoiling for a fight.

"Shall I tell 'em?" asked Captain Coldgrip in a whisper to the man in the mask.

"No."

Captain Coldgrip smiled.

"Thar's a little business that's got to be settled outside o' Gold Eye," he answered to the crowd. "Richard Redhilt has broken the law elsewhere."

"Who are you?"

"Captain Coldgrip."

"Whar from?"

The crisis was coming.

"It isn't necessary to state whar I'm from," was the answer, and every man thought he saw sparks leap from the speaker's eyes. "Men of Gold Eye, I have faced men like you in a thousand places between the two oceans. My business is to hunt men like the one at my side. Richard Redhilt knows that I have a right to take him from camp, and he knows, too, that if one of you lift a hand for his rescue I will crimson the snow with his blood. Let us understand one another. This man is your captain and my prisoner. I came here for one life. I don't want to take a dozen more."

Plainer words than these could not be spoken. The pards of Gold Eye noticed the cool emphasis that characterized them. The leader of the desperate twenty stood still with a revolver hanging along each leg. Richard Redhilt has not spoken. The lips under the rim of the black mask were glued together as if he was ready for the worst. He could keep the crowd back or send it forward by a sign or with a word—he did neither.

"We go on, Richard," spoke the gold-buttoned sport to his prisoner, and the two started on again.

The crowd looked on with the sullenness of a mob confronted by a regiment of soldiery. The exasperating coolness of one man was doing it all. It was not for their own lives that they cared, but the life of Richard Redhilt was at stake.

"Boys, we can't help 'im now," said the spokesman of the pards over his shoulder. "That devil who calls himself Captain Coldgrip is as cool as Old Nick himself, an' quicker nor a cat. We've got ter take 'im unawares. Ef Injun Nick war hyar thar'd be blood, in spite ov Captain Coldgrip's threat."

The crowd longed for the Indian they had cursed and despised, and there was not one man in it who would not have given his last ounce of dust for a person like Injun Nick to open the battle.

Richard Redhilt led Captan Coldgrip to the little log building which served as a shelter for the few horses owned by the inhabitants of Gold Eye.

The man with the gold buttons leaned against the logs that formed the door-frame, and saw his prisoner saddle a strong, iron-gray horse.

"He does not know that she is here," said Richard Redhilt to himself while he did this work. "If he knew, I fancy he wouldn't be so eager to get me out o' Gold Eye alone. Unless I tell him, he will never know that the biggest prize out o' doors came ter camp last night after the snow. Take me from Gold Eye, Captain Coldgrip; when I come back hyer—an', by heavens! I'm goin' to do that!—I'll hold a hand that the combined universe can't trump!"

The same sullen, mad-eyed crowd saw Richard Redhilt get up into the saddle beside the gold-laced sport and ride away.

"The girl must be asleep; she doesn't seem to know anything about this," muttered the mystic man of the camp.

Bertha, the avenger, was asleep.

The only occupant of Injun Nick's hut lay in the light and warmth of the fire on the clay hearth, in a dreamless slumber, which the proceedings just witnessed had not disturbed.

What would she say when she awoke, and found Richard Redhilt gone, carried off at the revolver's muzzle by a man who had never been seen in camp before? And what would be the astonishment of the pards of Gold Eye when they should behold the beautiful girl?

"How long have you been looking for me?" suddenly asked Richard Redhilt, turning to the man who had played Gold Eye's coolest hand.

"Almost ever since," was the answer.

"But you lost the scent?"

A smile was at the speaker's lips.

"Yes," said Captain Coldgrip, candidly, "I lost the scent. A man changes his skin, as it were, when he buries himself in the mountains of the West. I have changed mine, you see," and he smiled as he glanced at his sash and the two rows of gilt buttons.

"I remember," answered Richard Redhilt. "You hadn't gold enough to buy one o' those buttons when I left you in New York."

"That is true, Richard, but I have struck it rich since. You were clever to throw me off the scent. I found it, though, in Salt Lake."

The boss of Gold Eye started.

"I was somewhat surprised to discover that 'Monteban' had turned Mormon, but that man is capable of doing anything," Captain Coldgrip went on. "I frightened him nearly out of his senses there."

"What! did you reveal yourself?" exclaimed the Gold Eye sport.

"Not exactly. You know the peculiarity possessed by my right hand, Richard?" smiled the gold-button sport.

"Yes; it is always as cold as ice."

"Well, one night I caught 'Monteban' asleep, an' I laid my right hand upon his forehead. Jehu! he awakened in an instant, an' sprung up with a yell that would have done credit to a Comanche buck."

"And he saw you?"

"No; I was not to be seen—invisible, you see," laughed Coldgrip. "It is a wonder that he did not telegraph you that the man with the icy hand was in Utah."

"He did not."

"He may have thought it a dream, but he kept the house for some days afterward. But, Richard, this Monteban, as we used to know him in New York, what did he realize out of the play you made there?"

Richard Redhilt gave his captor a stern look.

"I betray nobody," he said. "Besides, Captain Coldgrip, I am not yet in the witness-box."

"What if I should tell you, Richard, that Monteban, the Mormon Spider, has found the lost securities?"

"What do I care if he has?" cried the Gold Eye sport. "They are not all."

"The girl is worth more, eh?"

There was no answer, save a proud flashing of Richard Redhilt's eyes.

"See here! The girl is where you will never find her," Captain Coldgrip went on, speaking with confidence. "Diamond Dan and the Mormon sport have lost sight of her. But I have found her, Richard. Captain Goldgrip the Sport Detective takes pleasure in telling you that the girl, orphaned by the Diamond League of Taree, will face you all in court. You hear me. I am not working this game for money. The man murdered by the Broadway Centipede was my best friend. The girl is where I can lay hands on her at any time. You first, Richard, then the Mormon Spider, and last the one of the three, who remained in New York."

"Then I am to be taken back, am I?" asked Richard Redhilt.

"Why not? The courts generally try men where the crime was committed."

"It is a long way to New York," said the masked sport.

"Don't let that bother you; we will get there!" was the answer.

"An' we ar' going now—"

"To Canyon City."

Richard Redhilt knew that Canyon City was a station on the railroad between Pueblo and Gunnison. It was about the same distance from Gold Eye as Alabaster, and he knew that the train passing east was due at the station at a certain hour in the afternoon.

"Am I going back to New York with this spotter?" he murmured. "Must I see this mask lifted and the scar that brands me as Robert Roy, the Broadway Centipede, exposed? Captain Coldgrip may think that he knows where the girl is, but he does not. The secret is mine unless something has happened in camp since I left. Monteban may have found the lost securities, but I don't believe it. This cool blade got dispatches intended for me. He took them from Injun Nick, the man who waited two months for them at Alabaster City. I am sure they were meant against him, but with them in his hands, he could pounce upon me unawares. I am not going to New York till I'm ready. I would sooner be Richard Redhilt in Colorado than the Broadway Centipede there. I was just getting ready to bleed the Mormon Spider, my old friend Monteban, when this Captain Coldgrip steps in. An' the girl, too! She had dropped into my hands like a peach. Jupiter Pluvius! an' I to give up the game now? If I land in New York this man's prisoner, may Satan take my head!"

The last thought ended, Richard Redhilt leaned toward Captain Coldgrip. The faces of the two sports almost touched.

"Captain ar' you sartain that Injun Nick will never report?" asked the Gold Eye sport, showing his teeth like a hyena while his eyes burned like two stars behind the mask.

"I make no mistakes, Richard," was the answer quickly spoken.

"That man has more lives than a cat. I've seen him killed three times. He's hardly dead when he's buried."

"I don't say he is dead now, but when a man falls from my right hand over a thousand-foot canyon wall I consider him out of the way!"

Richard Redhilt drew back and looked at the detective.

Eye met eye for a full minute.

"This man is more dangerous than I ever thought him," muttered the Gold Eye sport; "but for all that he shall never land me alive in New York! I don't believe he killed Injun Nick!"

CHAPTER V.

INJUN NICK.

"WHAT has become of Richard Redhilt? Is he searching the camp for the man I want? I have had an excellent sleep and feel refreshed."

Bertha, the avenger, had awakened at last, and the sunlight was streaming into the window of the little cabin. The fire on the hearth had gone down but the room was not cold although it was winter and the ground was white.

Richard Redhilt had not been seen since the previous night, and the girl did not know that Captain Coldgrip had successfully played one of the coolest games Gold Eye had ever seen.

She remembered that she was to keep close,

for Richard Redhilt had intimated that the Broadway Centipede, if he were in camp, might see her and take flight.

She had come too far to lose the quarry now. If the New York cut-throat was in Gold Eye, she must find him!

The morning passed without bringing the boss of the gold camp back. Bertha grew impatient. She went to the little window and looked out.

Here and there men were moving to and fro. She saw that they were stalwart fellows with great breadth of chest and bronze in complexion.

She scanned each one closely. What if she should discover the tell-tale scar?

Woe to Robert Roy if she found him first.

The young girl tried not to appear too conspicuous at the window. There were cabins near from which their occupants if they had any could see her and she wished to avoid discovery for the present.

Her horse, she believed, had been led to shelter by Richard Redhilt; she did not know that the desperado had taken it to a canyon and shot it dead.

It was the longest day the girl had ever seen.

"Something has happened to keep the masked man away," she said, as she watched another night steal over the camp. "Can it be that I am to be blamed for his absence? I would like to know what has transpired."

She went to the trap-door and lifted it with considerable effort. The steps that led to the floor of the short subterranean passage between the two cabins were before her and she went down.

In a little while she found herself in Richard Redhilt's shanty which was cold and dark. The very silence, coupled with the gloom told the girl that the place was deserted.

However, determined to know the truth, Bertha struck a match and found the lamp. It told her that the man in the mask was not there.

"As I expected," said the girl. "My coming to Gold Eye has had something to do with this. Can it be possible—"

She stopped suddenly and almost dropped the lamp, for at that moment she caught sight of a face at the window.

It was a dark face, with two glittering eyes, and the sight brought a wild cry to the girl's lips.

"Merciful Heaven! what eyes," she cried, as she recoiled.

In an instant the face disappeared, but a moment later the door opened and it was before her again, this time above the shoulders of a Hercules who had long hair as black as night.

The girl stood spell-bound before this creature.

"It is an Indian," flashed through her mind.

"Did this red demon know that I was here?"

The Indian came forward; Bertha could not retreat; her back already touched the cabin wall.

All at once his hand darted forward like a springing panther and closed on her wrist.

"What is Richard?" he asked.

"I don't know," said the startled girl. "He was here last night when I came. I haven't seen him since."

"Did the cold hand find him?"

"The cold hand?"—what do you mean?"

"Captain Coldgrip."

Bertha uttered a cry.

"Great Heavens! has that man been here?"

"He war on the road last night," said the Indian, a strange expression of grim merriment in his eyes. "He overtook me on the road. I felt the ice hand at my throat."

"Who are you?"

"Injun Nick."

"Richard Redhilt's friend?"

The red-skin nodded.

"Then you can tell me whether my coming to Gold Eye would frighten him away."

"No. Richard would not run away from you, girl," was the reply.

"Why does he wear that black mask?"

"Mebbe because it protects his face. When did you come in?"

"Last night."

"From the East?"

"From Denver."

"Not by the cars?"

"No, on horseback. Indian Nick, I am here for vengeance. I told Richard Redhilt this last night. I will tell you. I want a man who in New York was called the Broadway Centipede. He can be told by a scar on his cheek. You know every man in Gold Eye if you are Richard's pard. Tell me: Is this scarred man here?"

Injun Nick looked curiously at the girl while she spoke. His eyes had the gleam of sudden discovery.

"The man with the mask is not here," he said.

"Then I must look elsewhere," was the reply.

"What! you go away?" exclaimed the Indian.

"Yes."

"You will stay here till Richard comes back," he said with a firmness that brought a flash of resentment to Bertha's eyes.

"No person has a right to tell me this," she said. "I am my own mistress and there is blood that cries for vengeance. If the Broadway Centipede is not here, I have a right to hunt him elsewhere. But I can do this: I can search the camp myself, though I believe now that he is not in it. So you met Captain Coldgrip last night."

Injun Nick ground his teeth.

"He met me, my child," he said.

"Ha! you know him!"

"Yes, I know Captain Coldgrip," Bertha answered promptly. "He swore to find the man whom I seek. The captain is my friend and if he came here to this camp last night he would have given his right hand almost to have found me."

"I know that," said the Indian. "That hand had me by the throat when I thought Captain Coldgrip was thousands of miles away. The snow—curse the snow!—prevented me from hearing his horse. He rode me down with the silence of an arrow in the night, an' all at once along the top of the wall of the Big Canyon between hyer an' Alabaster I felt his icy hand at my throat an' he was asking at my ear for my dispatches."

"Dispatches?" echoed the girl.

"Dispatches for Richard," said the Indian.

"Who were they from?"

"Never mind that," said Injun Nick, as he proceeded. "We war on the top o' the canyon wall. I knew the hand the moment it touched my skin. It is as cold as ice in the summer time; that right hand never gets warm. Well, it seemed to cut its way to my windpipe. Our horses stopped, an' Captain Coldgrip laughed in my face as he told me that he guessed he had found somebody he'd been looking for. I made a fight for my life, but what could a dozen Injun Nicks do ag'in' that hand? My horse was forced to the edge of the trail. 'Take your dispatches to the devil!' suddenly cried this Captain Coldgrip, and the next moment we were falling over the thousand foot wall."

"Both of you!" cried the excited girl.

"Injun Nick an' his horse," said the red-skin, with a faint smile. "Captain Coldgrip did not know that at that particular place many trees grew from the rocks. They are not large, but strong. My horse went down through them like a stone, but I caught. Injun Nick was saved to pay this Captain Coldgrip back. The Red Tiger of Colorado is ready with tooth and claw for another tussle wherever he finds his enemy."

Bertha could only look at the man who paused and held out his dark hands which were soft and dangerous.

"Captain Coldgrip beat me to Gold Eye," Injun Nick went on. "I lay a long time among the trees unconscious. The hand that caught my throat almost finished me. I wandered about the mountain out of my head. Not until a few hours ago did my mind come back. It is a terrible thing to feel the grip of that bloodless hand. I am here now, but Richard is gone. Don't you know that Captain Coldgrip took him?"

"I do not," said Bertha.

"Then I will find out," and Injun Nick moved toward the door.

"You will stay here," he went on in tones of authority. "When Richard Redhilt is away, Injun Nick runs Gold Eye."

"But you will tell me this!" cried the girl, starting forward. "Is this Richard Redhilt—can he be—the Broadway Centipede?"

The Indian did not speak.

"Who else would Captain Coldgrip hunt?" Bertha went on.

"He is a sleuth-hound by profession," said the Indian. "He will take up any trail for money."

"There is one to which money did not send him. Heavens! why did I not know last night that I had found the man I want? You cannot deceive me, Indian Nick. Richard Redhilt is the red-handed Broadway Centipede."

Injun Nick opened the door, and Bertha saw the glitter in his eyes.

"You will stay here, girl," he said sternly, once more, and the next moment he was gone.

"I began to connect these two men now," murmured the astonished Bertha. "I recollect that at the time the crime was committed, an Indian was performing feats of strength at Madison Square Garden, that he and the Centipede were seen often together, and that they disappeared at the same time. I have found them both. The reappearance of the Indian here fixes Richard Redhilt's identity. Beyond question he is Robert Roy. Fate was against me last night. I have missed my man by a hair, and if he has fallen into Captain Coldgrip's hands, he will go back to New York dead or alive."

The young girl went to the window as she finished, but Injun Nick had already disappeared.

If she could have followed him, she would have seen him enter a cabin not far from Richard Redhilt's.

It was occupied.

"Silas?" said the Indian, and a young man tall and straight as an arrow sprung from a cot and confronted him.

He was not past twenty-three; he had an excellent figure, and was very handsome.

He uttered an exclamation strangely tinged with joy and regret when he saw Injun Nick.

"Why didn't you come sooner?" said the young man.

"I could not," said the Indian through clinched teeth. "I want you to tell me what has happened?"

For five minutes the young man, known as Silver Silas to the toughs of Gold Eye, spoke without being interrupted. He told the story of Captain Coldgrip's swoop upon the camp, his coolness and his success.

The Indian listened now with eyes on fire, as it were, and now with a cold steely glitter in their depths.

"Silas, have you seen the girl?" asked Injun Nick at the end of the narrative.

The young man started visibly.

"What girl?" he asked. "If there is an angel in camp, nobody knows it."

"One is here. She came last night, an' I turn her over to you. She is at the captain's cabin, an' she must stay here till I come back."

"You are going away?"

"I am going to find Richard Redhilt," said Injun Nick firmly. "Nobody is to coax or take the girl from Gold Eye during my absence. I shall hold you answerable for her safety; so will the captain. You are going to say that the eagle that swooped upon Gold Eye has a long start an' is already far away. I know that. Distance is nothing to Injun Nick. I will find Richard if I have to go to the big city by the Atlantic. I will find Captain Coldgrip also. You will guard this girl with a hawk's eye. When I come back an' ask for her, you must be able to produce her."

The young man bowed.

"I am off," continued the Indian from the door. "Gold Eye need not be told for the present, that I have been here. The snow will show me the trail I want. You will see this girl an' make her stay pleasant. Remember! she is not to leave camp, an', above all, nobody is to be permitted to take her away."

The door of Silver Silas's cabin opened and shut, and while he remained startled by the Indian's visit, that worthy had reached the stables.

Ten minutes later a horse galloped swiftly from Gold Eye, and the black-eyed man who leaned from the blanket and watched the snowy trail had long hair.

On, on over the mountain road that was as tortuous as the snake's path.

The stern-faced rider no longer watched the trail; he seemed to know where the game was.

It was late when he rode into a small town that seemed asleep.

He did not draw rein until he reached a frame building at the railroad track. In a little window was a bright light, and a young man was on duty there.

Injun Nick appeared to him like an apparition.

"Did two men board the train here to-day?" asked the Indian.

"Yes," was the reply.

"Did one wear a black mask?"

"No; but one had a scar on one of his cheeks, and seemed to be the other one's prisoner."

Injun Nick gave a start.

"Captain Coldgrip made his prisoner unmask," muttered the Indian; then he turned again to the operator.

"Whar is the train now?" he asked.

The young man glanced at the time card over his desk.

"If nothing has happened it is at Rocky Gulch," he said.

The Indian looked disappointed but his eyes lost none of their glitter.

Just then the telegraph instrument on a little table began to tick.

The young operator started and bent over his machine. Suddenly he looked up at the Indian.

"The train is wrecked between Eagle's Nest and Rocky Gulch," he said.

Injun Nick sprang from the room and gave a wild yell of triumph.

CHAPTER VI.

SATAN HELPS HIS OWN.

To return to Captain Coldgrip and his prisoner, it is for us to say, in the first place, that the pair reached Canyon City without incident.

Richard Redhilt was completely unarmed, but he watched his captor like an eagle, ready to seize the first opportunity that would offer him the upper hand.

It was true that the young telegraph operator confronted by Injun Nick had seen the scar on the cheek of the Gold Eye sport, for Captain Coldgrip had prevailed upon him to discard the mask, which would have attracted too much attention.

The train that pulled up to the little depot of Canyon City was not very well supplied with passengers.

"Come," said Captain Coldgrip, in low tones to his prisoner. "We begin the long trip now!"

Richard Redhilt gave him a look of hatred.

"You have no tickets," he said.

"We get them at Pueblo."

The two men went aboard the cars, and the train was in motion again.

"Jerusalem! what does that mean?" exclaimed a man who was in the coach when the two sports entered. "By my life! Richard Redhilt has fallen into the clutches of the man he has been trying for two years to avoid."

The speaker was a large man in plain citizen's clothes. His face was well rounded, rather dark, and smooth, and a profusion of black hair almost touched his shoulders. He wore a large soft hat with a wide brim, which, the moment he saw the two sports, he pulled down over his eyes.

He saw Richard Redhilt drop into a certain seat, while Captain Coldgrip took the one directly behind him.

"He took that seat to keep his eye on Richard," he went on. "I wonder if my friend got the dispatch I told Dick to send? It told him to look out for that very man, but he has found him. I'd give a thousand ounces to know how Captain Coldgrip stole the march on him, and how he got him away from Gold Eye. I shall take a hand in this game. I won't go to Denver if I can't play my hand between hyer and Pueblo. I will go on till I get the chance. Richard shall not go to New York with the man who has nabbed him!"

This man was the sender of the first dispatch mentioned in this story—the one from Salt Lake City, signed "Monteban."

By some men he was known as the Mormon Spider, to others he was Luke Logan, one of the sharpest of city sharps, but now a prominent follower of Brigham Young, and a man whose wealth was supposed to be enormous.

He and Richard Redhilt had been pards in New York. They were two of the three men whose names were linked to one of the most monstrous crimes ever committed in that city.

Captain Coldgrip wanted all three; he had already found one, and now, though he knew it not, another was within his grasp.

The New York sport had turned Mormon for gain, and a shrewder and more merciless disciple the wild and wicked faith never had.

Luke Logan was on his way to Denver when he discovered his pard, Richard Redhilt, in the hands of Captain Coldgrip, and on his way to New York, where he had committed the crime from which he had been forced to fly.

"If I don't get my old pard out of this scrape, may I never sleep again!" grated the Mormon spider as he watched the detective and his prisoner from under the broad brim of his hat.

If Captain Coldgrip should recognize him, Richard Redhilt might have a companion in misfortune, for Luke Logan or Monteban, as he sometimes called himself, believed the captain capable of taking two men East.

The shadows of the winter day began to gather at Pueblo, where, according to the natural course of his intentions, the Mormon sport would have to change cars for Denver. As yet he had found no chance for interference.

"Denver can go!" he said to himself. "My work is to rescue my old pard. I stop at nothing short of that, and, Captain Coldgrip, you must lose your prisoner, and perhaps your life, two thousand miles this side of Gotham."

All the time Richard Redhilt had watched his chance. The man in the seat behind him had the eyes of a hawk; he knew that at the first move on his part he would be covered by the deadliest revolver in the far West.

At Pueblo the conductor purchased for Captain Coldgrip two first-class tickets for New York.

The Mormon looked disappointed.

"The captain knows his man," he said to himself. "I've got to inaugurate new schemes." And he settled back into his seat again and put his fertile mind to work.

Night came.

The train flying through the gorges was bearing the three men toward the city thousands of miles away.

Luke Logan had paid his fare from Pueblo to the Colorado line.

"The work must be done in Colorado," he said to himself. "I don't want to get too far from Denver."

At last he began to move toward the two men in the forward end of the car. Seat by seat, with his smooth face half hidden by the hat, he crept forward with the movements of the assassin.

The interior of the coach was not well lighted. There were dark corners and many shadows.

Richard Redhilt seemed to grow uneasy. He rested his head on the back of the seat and appeared to doze.

"Goin' ter New York, ain't I?" he muttered. "The cool devil behind me has played one of the sleekest games I ever heard of. I am leaving the bonanza girl behind—the girl sent by fate or fortune into Gold Eye when I was dying to know what had become of her. If I had Luke, the Mormon hyer, or Diamond Dan, thar'd be a scene that'd wake this car up. Pueblo is behind us. Great Caesar! thar's no telling what will happen in Gold Eye before I get back. The girl will be discovered and the camp will have a reg'lar sensation, and she may suspect that the man who took her in war the Broadway Centi-

pede. Ha! ha! She didn't even suspicion me when she saw the mask."

Captain Coldgrip showed no signs of weariness. His eyes were as bright as diamonds, and not for a moment did they lose sight of the cool blade he had bagged.

Did he expect to take Richard Redhilt all the way to New York? No other intention was his.

The few passengers in the car had arranged themselves for the night. Here was one and there another, strangers to the sport with the sleepless eye, and only casually noticed by him.

Meanwhile, the man in the big, soft hat was approaching.

The shadows favored him, for the wind flared the lamps, and at times almost extinguished them.

"What's the use ov foolin' with this game?" suddenly exclaimed the Mormon sport. "One more seat and I will have you, captain."

Captain Coldgrip did not seem to see this man, or, if he did, he was watching him furtively, and for a purpose.

Two seats separated Luke Logan from the Sport Detective. The train was running over a tolerably smooth stretch of road, although high walls of rock rose on either side of the track. A little town called Eagle's Nest had just been passed.

All at once the Mormon dropped into the seat behind Captain Coldgrip. The seat was in shadow, and the taking of it was so noiseless that it would not have wakened a cat.

Luke Logan leaned toward the window and looked out. Night had possession of the world. Over the shoulders of Captain Coldgrip he saw the head of Richard Redhilt.

He longed to tell his old pard that he was near; he felt like laying his hand on Richard's shoulder and calling him Robert Roy, his New York name. But Captain Coldgrip was between, and he could not talk to Richard until he was out of the way.

Suddenly and without noise the Mormon sport drew a knife, and his fingers closed firmly about the bony hilt. He sent a scrutinizing look down the car, and in a second saw that the passengers were asleep. The time had come. He would drive home the knife he held, jerk the bell-rope, rouse Richard, and jump from the train when it slowed up.

All this would not take up a minute.

"I've never played a fool hand in all my life," said Monteban to himself. "This is one of the best I have held since leaving New York. It captures the aces held by Captain Coldgrip, and ends his last man-hunt in Colorado."

He had but to lean forward and strike the deadly blow downward over the shoulders of the man who was watching Richard Redhilt.

"Now!" said the Mormon sport. "This is the place. We must be half-way between Eagle's Nest and Rocky Gulch."

All at once Luke Logan sprang up and the next moment his left arm came down over Captain Coldgrip's face like a lasso. It tightened under his chin and jerked his head back with great violence.

"It is I, captain!" he hissed, in his victim's ear. "It is the Mormon Spider to the rescue!"

With the completion of the last sentence the bowie shot toward the lamp overhead and then—

A terrible crash interrupted its descent!

Luke Logan fell forward in the twinkling of an eye, clear over Captain Coldgrip's head, and landed like a rock upon the boss of Gold Eye!

The car was swaying like an unsteady bridge, and some of the other passengers were lying in seats from which they had been thrown by the shock!

An instant later the cars in the rear crashed against the coach occupied by our three characters, and then it fell over with an awful sound.

All this in the limited space of a second!

Captain Coldgrip by the merest chance was not hurled forward. He could not think whose hand had just reached for his throat, but in a flash he thought it was the hand of an enemy.

He darted toward the two men struggling between the two seats ahead, and saw for the first time the face of the Mormon Spider.

In the light of the lamp the eyes of the men met, and then the rear cars crushing up, threw their coach over and sent it headlong toward the bottom of the gulch like a log!

The check was sudden and terrible, and the Sport Detective found himself hurled against the end of the car with a force sufficient to break all his bones. This did not look like taking Richard Redhilt to New York.

The interior of the mountain coach was a pandemonium. Men crushed under heavy seats were groaning and cursing, a lamp had been dashed from its bronze pocket, and its spilled contents were blazing in the middle of the car!

Captain Coldgrip went toward the fire and took one man from under a seat near by. It was not Richard Redhilt.

"Have I lost my bird?" he exclaimed. "If fortune has cheated me I will turn against her. What would you say, Bertba, if you could know that Richard Redhilt was in my clutches a moment ago, but that he has escaped? Who is

in this car? I will see the face of every man before I get away."

The inside of the car was light enough now. Captain Coldgrip found the seat he occupied at the time of the accident; he saw the broken ones just ahead of it, but the two men seen there before the coach fell were gone.

"The bird is in the bush!" he said through grated teeth. "I've got to go back and begin again. This unexpected catastrophe has interfered with my plans and with vengeance, but it also saved my life. The bowie of the Mormon was coming down when it happened. Who looked for Luke Logan here? But last night he warned Richard Redhilt from Salt Lake that I was on the trail; now I find him on the cars eastward bound. He almost beat his telegram."

Captain Coldgrip did not leave the car until he was convinced that neither of the sports was in it. There were two dead passengers among the seats and a tall man with red whiskers was nursing a broken arm while he looked for a valise which he said was very valuable.

The man with the cold hand left the burning car without his prisoner.

His lips were tightly closed and his eyes were seen to flash. At the bottom of the gulch he stood alone, and looked up at the stars and the lanterns burning here and there.

"Warn't it a crusher, cap'n?" said a voice at his elbow.

Captain Coldgrip turned and confronted the man with the broken arm.

"It was a reg'lar stunner," continued the man. "We don't go any further this night, bet yer royal head, pard. Ther engineer ar' dead an' so's ther conductor. We ran slap ag'in' a ten-million-pound boulder that fell across ther track since the last train went west; thet's what landed us hyer. Ef I had my valise I wouldn't keer a continental darn. My name is Joe Peabody, I war goin' east with ther model ov an invention thet would revolutionize society. Sit down an' I will explain my celebrated Electro—"

Captain Coldgrip broke the speaker's sentence by turning away.

A smile was at the corners of the detective's mouth.

"Don't want ter hear me, hey?" persisted the inventor following him up.

"Hear you? no!" And the Sport Detective gave the red-whiskered crank a stern look.

"Just now I have other business."

"All hunky, cap'n. Ther time will come when you'll wish you had invested in Joe Peabody's Celebrated Electro Dynamic Clothes Washer. I tell yer, pard, that when—"

Captain Coldgrip was gone and the wrecked genius was talking to the wind.

"I don't want to hear a fool now," said the detective. "I have two birds to cage instead of one. I've got to begin a new game. We'll see who rakes in the last stake."

CHAPTER VII.

INJUN NICK'S TEETH.

It is six months later. Gold Eye is, in some respects, Gold Eye still, but there are evidences that the denizens of the camp have struck it rich since we saw them last cursing Captain Coldgrip's coolness.

Mines are flourishing where none were open then, and the camp is having flush times.

The recollection of Coldgrip's visit has passed from the minds of most of those who were in the camp when it was made.

In six months there have been many changes. Men have died and moved away, and the boss of the mountain camp is not a man who wears a mask.

It is night, a rare summer night, and the cabin doors stand open.

A round moon hangs in the cloudless sky like a silver shield, and myriads of insects circle about the lights in the rough monte den and saloon that supplies the camp with play and drink.

Standing near one of the several tables in operation is a Hercules in dark red—an Indian with midnight eyes and wiry hair which touches his broad shoulders.

He is watching a certain man, not the game going on at the table.

Every now and then a singular glitter is seen in the Indian's eyes; he sees nothing, nobody but the man.

There is something about the person so closely watched by the red-skin which indicates that he is not a gold-camp frequenter. He has certain manners that stamp him a foreigner to Gold Eye, and yet he has been there almost a week, playing nightly at the tables and "loafing" during the day.

The Indian, who is dressed in civilized though Western garments, is strangely attracted by the gambler, who is handsome and about thirty-five.

All at once the red-skin draws back and walks to another table. The sport has ceased to play for the night.

He leaves the table and walks to the counter, speaks to the bartender and throws down a drink, all the time furtively eyed by the Indian.

Two minutes later the gambler is beyond the door.

Hear him:

"I guess they've pulled up stakes for good," he says. "Is it possible that I have come all the way from New York to find nobody? These men, or those I have attempted to question, turn themselves into sphinxes. The Centipede was here in the winter. I sent him a telegram, and followed it with several letters in cipher, but not a reply. I'm not going to leave this camp till I go away on his trail. Captain Coldgrip came this way last winter. I warned the Centipede that he had struck the trail. These men have promised to give nobody any clew. Some whose very expression proves them liars tell me without blushing that they don't know anything about the man I want. They shall not baffle me, though. I have come too far to throw up my hand."

"Diamond?" says a voice so near that the gambler starts.

"Who called me?" is the quick reply. "Oh! you?"

The man leaned forward, for at that moment he had caught sight of a man who had evidently just emerged from the ranch.

"I thought I knew you," continued the person, walking forward, and Diamond looked into the dark face of the Indian who had watched him all evening.

For a minute there was no reply.

The two men stood face to face in the moonlight, a faint smile on the Indian's lips, and in the white man's eyes an expression of startled wonder.

"I ought to know you," said the white man. "Yes. I am Injun Nick."

"Ah! Richard Redhilt's pard while he was here, and the Scarlet Hercules of the Madison Square Garden."

The Indian's look told that he had been identified.

"I would sooner find you than a gold mine," continued the white man, squeezing the Indian's hand. "I was about to give up the chase. The galoots of this camp lie to a fellow's face, I find. So you are Injun Nick? Good! where can we go for a quiet talk?"

During this speech the keen eyes of the red looked the speaker over from head to foot. He seemed to be measuring strength and calculating his agility.

"A talk?" suddenly said Injun Nick. "What do you want to talk about?"

"I will tell you when you show me a place," was the reply.

"Follow me, captain."

Injun Nick led the way to cabin not far from the monte ranch. The moon shining through the window that flanked the door rendered an artificial light unnecessary.

"Now, Diamond, I am at your service," said the Indian, dropping upon one of the two three-legged stools near a table.

The curt sentences of Injun Nick seemed to nettle the man from New York.

"You didn't used to be this way," he said looking the red-man in the face.

"How?"

"Curt. You used to have the loosest tongue of any man in Gotham. I am here to be treated civilly. I did not come—"

A hand darted over the table and dropped upon Diamond Dan's arm.

"Captain, you will go straight to the talk you wanted," said the lips of the Indian, although the eyes seemed to have spoken.

Diamond Dan bit his lip under the big mustache that covered his mouth.

"Well. Are you alone here?" he said.

"No. Gold Eye gives me a good deal of company."

"I did not mean that. Where is Richard?" Injun Nick shook his head.

"He was here in the winter?"

"Yes."

"Did Captain Coldgrip come?"

The red-skin's eyes took on a sudden flame.

"The man with the cold hand came an' went," he said.

"But he did not get Richard?"

"He did."

Diamond Dan uttered a cry and almost left his stool.

"He got Richard Redhilt," continued Injun Nick. "He took him away on the cars. At Pueblo he bought two tickets for New York."

"Heavens! six months ago and I never heard of it!"

"Mebbe not, captain."

Injun Nick leaned against the table and waited for the New York sport to go on.

"But Richard got away, didn't he?" asked Diamond Dan.

"Do you know he did?"

"No, but— Look here! if your tongue is purchasable I am able to buy."

Diamond Dan ran a hand into an inner pocket and produced a leathern pocket-book which he opened deftly and displayed a huge lot of gold notes of large denominations.

He pushed it toward the Indian who eyed it closely, but drew back with a visible sign of aversion.

"I want information," he went on. "We were friends, I think, in New York. That money is yours for the information I am after."

Injun Nick's hand fell upon the pocket-book

and a gleam of triumph lit up the white man's eyes.

"I don't want it, captain," he said shoving the pocket-book back toward its owner. "Your money would blush beside Injun Nick's bonanza."

"But you will talk without it, won't you?"

"Yes; go on."

A change that delighted Diamond Dan came over the Indian's countenance.

"I've broken the icicle at last," said the New Yorker to himself. "Before I leave this camp I will be on the trail."

Then he put up the pocket-book and leaned eagerly toward the Indian waiting for him to proceed.

"Tell me all now, Injun Nick," he said. "Don't cut your sentences like you'd cut an enemy's throat, but give me a connected narrative. Richard Redhilt was taken away by Captain Coldgrip, you say. Didn't he get my dispatch that warned him against that man?"

"Captain Coldgrip got it," said the Indian. "He took it from the telegraph operator at Alabaster and then followed me."

"Why didn't you kill him?"

Injun Nick leaned suddenly across the table. Diamond Dan saw his face grow demoniacal in the white moonlight.

"Why didn't you kill him once in New York?" asked the Indian. "Why didn't you do many things then that were not done? If you had showed sand on several occasions, the girl would never have been lost, the—"

"I'll admit it all if you'll stop," exclaimed Diamond Dan.

"We fail to do many needful things. Now go on."

"About Richard?"

"Yes."

Injun Nick leaned against the table again and seemed to lock his mouth.

A terrible look of determination came to his dark eyes; it made the white man curse him in the depths of his heart.

"Don't you intend to proceed?" he asked.

There was no answer.

"I don't want you to betray your pard Richard," Diamond Dan continued. "You must remember that he and I are friends, and that in a certain game we are working for each other's interest. You have been with Richard long enough to know that Captain Coldgrip, the New York sleuth-bound is hunting both of us; that he would not hesitate to drag us back to Gotham. He would take you along if he could."

The next second the red-skin was on his feet, and with his left hand on the table, he leaned forward and glared into the startled sport's face.

"What would he take me to New York for?" he asked.

"You ought to know."

Diamond Dan tried to give the Indian look for look.

"This fellow sha'n't browbeat me," he said to himself. "He hates a rope and a prison as a coward hates hell's pains. I can play a game as cold as the one he threatens."

Then he went on:

"Yes, I say you ought to know, Injun Nick. You left the city with the Centipede; the patrons of the Madison Square Circus suddenly missed their Scarlet Hercules. The detectives put this and that together, and for a while they were looking for a red man as well as a white one. Yes, Captain Coldgrip means you, too!"

Up went the Indian's hand; there was nothing in it, but Diamond Dan watched it with singular fascination.

"Diamond Dan lies!" cried Injun Nick, and the hand came down like a weight on the New Yorker's shoulder. "My hand never touched that crime. I left the big city with Richard Redhilt, but not for crime. A bond cemented by an oath unites us. I am his friend and brother, and for that man, though he is steeped in crime, Injun Nick would walk through the fires of Tartarus! You have come here to find him. You think he can make you richer than you are. When he left New York, hunted by Captain Coldgrip and his fellow-bloodhounds, you were hiding under the wharves—you, the man who conceived that red crime, but who was too cowardly to carry it out. It was through your weakness that the girl, the real stake in the game, was lost to the players. You want her, too, I suppose. Why don't you go and ask the Mormon Spider?"

Diamond Dan, the New York sport, could not catch his breath for a moment after the Indian's close.

He was not looking for an outburst of this kind.

"Where is Luke Logan?" he asked at last.

"When I saw him last he was in Salt Lake City."

"Rich?"

"The richest and the meanest Mormon there! Captain, you will go and hunt him."

"But—"

Injun Nick's hand closed on the sport's shoulders, and with an ease that startled him he was jerked from his stool.

"This is Nick's ground," continued the red-skin. "He is on guard here."

"On guard, eh?"

"On guard, Diamond Dan, and woe to the man who crosses my line without authority!"

Diamond Dan was at the door of the cabin before he could frame a reply; the next moment he stood bewildered in the moonlight, and the door was shut!

"Captain, I give you ten minutes to leave Gold Eye," came from the shanty.

"I won't take five, but I don't go for fear of you, Injun Nick. I came here civilly. I have been treated like a dog, and I tell you now that hereafter at another place I will show you that this insult will bear interest!"

"All right, Diamond Dan. Colorado is not New York. There's a bonanza for you if you can only find it."

"I'll find it," hissed the Gotham sport. "You've already put me on its trail."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECOND TRIAL.

DIAMOND DAN, instead of going to the stables where was quartered the horse which had carried him from Alabaster City, walked back to the gambling resort he had left a short time before.

"I am going to get at the truth. I didn't come all the way from New York to Colorado to lose the game in this way. If the Indian will not give me any satisfaction, a white man shall. I want to know what happened here that keeps Richard Redhilt or the Broadway Centipede away, and why he keeps Injun Nick on guard?"

Talking thus to himself, the New York sport entered the saloon and approached a man who, with his elbows resting on the edge of the counter, seemed to be studying the somewhat animated scenes before him.

"You are Bronze Blake, I believe?" said the New Yorker.

"That's who this piece of anatomy is," was the answer. "War yer goin' ter suggest that we drink, eh?"

Diamond Dan smiled at the fellow's cuteness, and the drinks were speedily forthcoming.

"What will you take to go to Alabaster?" asked the sport.

"To-night, cap'n?"

"Right away."

"Want a guide back, eh?"

"Yes."

Bronze Blake reflected for a moment.

"Fifty dollars," he said.

Diamond Dan had seen this man before, but this time he looked him over again, and concluded that he was the person he wanted.

"Agreed," he said. "Come! we will start at once."

Bronze Blake was a man of forty, or forty-five, with a well-knit but somewhat angular figure, and a pair of small, brown eyes.

"I will get the truth from this man," muttered Diamond Dan. "I heard him remark yesterday that he was present at the birth of Gold Eye. Injun Nick can keep his secrets, but Bronze Blake will give me the clew."

The New York sport did not say good-by to the occupants of the ranch. He had come to the mountain-camp unheralded a few days before, and now he would leave it without any demonstration.

Besides, he might have remembered that Injun Nick had given him ten minutes in which to leave camp, and he did not want any more words at present with that unsatisfactory redskin.

Diamond Dan's mission from New York was the finding of Richard Redhilt *alias* Robert Roy, the Broadway Centipede. Six months had passed since he had heard from his old pard in crime, and a certain big game could not be played successfully unless he found Richard, and a certain girl called Bertha.

Diamond Dan was a shrewd fellow, and to his shrewdness was coupled a desperateness which was well known in the far East.

"I feel like going back and shooting that Indian," he said madly, in undertones, when he left the saloon with Bronze Blake. "He told me that the Mormon sport, Luke Logan, is in Salt Lake. He may have lied, but the man I have picked will settle the question. I may not go back to Alabaster City after all."

The two men were mounted on good horses almost before the allotted ten minutes had passed, and they rode slowly from camp.

Diamond Dan was eager to begin on the man he had selected as the Judas of Gold Eye.

A man who would start for Alabaster City at night for money, he thought, would do more than that for gold.

"Seems ter me, cap'n, thet ye'r goin' away from camp on quick notice," said Bronze Blake as they left Gold Eye at their backs. "You didn't git ter flip cards with Injun Nick. He's a daisy with ther pasteboards, thet Injun is."

"Has he always been here?" asked Diamond Dan.

"He is off an' on like a settin' hen," smiled Bronze Blake.

"I mean, has he been here all the time during the last six months?"

"No. We'd rather he'd stay away all ther time."

"You don't like Injun Nick?"

A scowl appeared on Bronze Blake's brow and a thrill of pleasure shot to Diamond Dan's heart.

"I've struck the right man!" he said to himself. "I'll pump this Gold Eye galoot plumb dry."

They were riding through silvery moonlight, and the horses, walking slowly, were side by side.

"When did Injun Nick desert his master?" said Diamond Dan.

"He never did," was the quick reply. "Don't I know thet Injun Nick is hyer on guard?"

"Guarding what?"

Bronze Blake suddenly became reticent; he seemed to draw himself in like a snail into his shell, and his eyes began to study the man at his side as if he had all at once become an object of suspicion.

"Who—ar—you?" he asked, slowly. "You ain't Captain Coldgrip?"

"Not much!" cried Diamond Dan, bursting into a laugh. "If I were that fellow I wouldn't have spent four days in Gold Eye with Injun Nick and Richard Redhilt's old pards on the alert."

"Thet's so," ejaculated Bronze Blake.

"I am Richard Redhilt's old pard," continued the New York sport, speaking fast as he leaned toward the Gold Eye guide. "I'm going to come down to business without further ceremony. It depends on you, my friend, whether I go to Alabaster City or not."

"On me, cap'n?" exclaimed the astonished tough.

Diamond Dan nodded.

"I want to know what happened here after Captain Coldgrip took Richard Redhilt away," he went on, a moment later. "You know and you can tell me, Bronze Blake. Richard had an oath-bound band around him here. You may have been one of the number."

"But I wasn't," said the gold camp galoot. "Thar isn't a single member of thet band in camp now; they all went away shortly arter Richard came back."

"He came back then?" asked Diamond Dan with an eagerness which he could not conceal.

"He came back sayin' thet Captain Coldgrip didn't take 'im far, thet fortune interfered in the strangest way imaginable. Do yer b'lieve in special Providences, Diamond Dan?"

"No!" said the New Yorker, smiling; "but we'll not discuss that subject here. I want to know if you will tell me what happened here after Richard Redhilt's return."

"What's it worth?"

A gleam of victory came into the eyes of the seaboard sport.

"I've got him just where I've wanted him," he murmured.

"Is it worth two hundred in clean cash?" he said.

"Only thet, cap'n?" asked Bronze Blake, with a sneer.

"Five hundred, then. Now, go on."

The citizen of Gold Eye straightened in his saddle.

"Richard Redhilt came back ter Gold Eye between two days," he said. "He hedn't been gone long, but in thet time thet camp made a startlin' diskivery thet put it on its ear. We hed an inhabitant thet nobody knowed anything about—a young girl purtier nor thet premium picture of a chremo shop. Cap'n, I've seen many a handsome female in my time, but thet one—Jupiter Pluvius! she war a double-distilled seraph from Paradise Cross-roads, or elsewhar. She war under thet protection of a young chap called Silver Silas, a citizen of Gold Eye an', morally, about thet best man thet camp had."

"Thar war a time when Richard an' thet girl met. He had on thet mask thet he always wore in camp an' thet sight o' it seemed ter stir thet beauty's blood. She had ter be held away from Richard, an' it took all o' Injun Nick's strength ter do it too. If it hadn't been for thet Injun galoot's strong arms she'd hev sent a dagger ter thet boss's heart in spite of all he could hev done. We've hed circuses in Gold Eye, cap'n, but thet one secured thet bun."

"What was the cause of the girl's anger?" asked Diamond Dan, who had become intensely interested in Bronze Blake's story.

"It was a feud of some kind—something thet happened in New York several years ago," was the answer, as the gold-camp citizen continued. "We couldn't get thet hang o' it from what thet seraph said. She told Richard thet thar war a scar on his cheek which war suthin' none of us knew anything about; she said thet she had registered an oath in heaven ter punish three men, an' he war ter be thet first. She called him—let me see. What war it?"

Bronze Blake paused and fell into deep thought.

"Was it Robert Roy?" asked Diamond Dan, smiling.

"Thet war it!" cried the mountain man. "Sometimes she called him thet Broadway Centerpede. It war a jimdandy show for Gold Eye, I tell yer, cap'n."

"What happened next?"

"Suthin' thet warn't altergetherun expected," said Bronze Blake. "Thet girl went away thet night."

Diamond Dan started violently.

"Went away?" he echoed.

"Yes."

"With Richard Redhilt?"

"No; thet masked boss of Gold Eye war thar in thet mornin', but thet seraph and Injun Nick war gone."

"Thet red demon had a hand in it, then!" grated the New York sport.

"We all thought he had, because he an' thet girl war missin' at thet same time. It war evident from looks and so forth thet Richard Redhilt knowed all about thet double disappearance, but he wer' thet chief catamount o' Gold Eye an' thet camp didn't squeal. Two nights arter these proceedin's Richard himself went off, an' then thet young chap called Silver Silas. Arter thet one by one Richard's oath-bound men got away, till now thet only man of thet old lay-out in camp is thet red-skin known as Injun Nick."

"Cap'n," concluded Bronze Blake, glancing at Diamond Dan's left breast, "do yer think my story's worth thet five hundred?"

"You know nothing more?" said the New Yorker. "You don't know where Richard Redhilt is?"

"He never came back nor furnished Gold Eye with his address; but I'll bet my hopes of angel wings thet Injun Nick knows."

"Of course he does, but he won't tell."

"You couldn't shoot thet information out o' thet cool Injun," said Bronze Blake positively. "About three weeks arter Richard an' all the rest went away, a man came hyer over thet mountains from Denver an' from thet way he acted he war tryin' ter find thet alcalde."

"Who was he?"

Diamond Dan leaned forward suddenly and asked the question with great eagerness.

"I don't know exactly. He singled me out jist as you hev done, captain, an' I told him thet hull story. He seemed to be a cool, shrewd fellow an' when he left he made me promise thet if I ever discovered Richard's whereabouts I'd go ter Alabaster an' telegraph him. I war ter dispatch ter Logan Lucas, Salt Lake City."

"In other words to Luke Logan, the Mormon Nabob!" exclaimed Diamond Dan. "I know that man. Richard Redhilt is playing a game all by himself. He has thrown us off. He is hiding from his old pards and from Captain Coldgrip, the Gotham Vidocq, as we sometimes called him in the East. But I don't see what keeps Injun Nick here."

"Neither do I," said Bronze Blake. "I sometimes think that he expects that Captain Coldgrip will show up again in Gold Eye. The coolest game ever played hyer war played when thet captain walked off with Richard in thet teeth of thet hull crowd. Now, Diamond, what's yer conclusions? Shall we go on ter Alabaster City?"

"Yes," said the New Yorker firmly. "I am booked for Salt Lake. Between you and I, Bronze Blake, I am one of the main players in this big game. I want to find three persons—Richard Redhilt, the Mormon Spider, and the girl Bertha."

"An' Captain Coldgrip?" asked the Gold Eye sport showing his teeth.

"I shall institute no particular search for him, but if he is still on the old trail I shall probably meet him."

"He is still on the old trail, Diamond Dan!" said a stern voice, and a man rode upon the trail in front of the couple. "Hands up, gentlemen! The person who has the honor of addressing you is Captain Coldgrip."

CHAPTER IX.

THE COLDGRIP'S CLUTCH.

BRONZE BLAKE uttered a thrilling cry of terror and almost fell from the saddle.

Diamond Dan's face lost its color, and his hand stopped half-way on the journey toward his revolvers.

"Hands starward, gentlemen," continued the same voice.

"Hyers mine," said the Gold Eye galoot and his dark hands were raised above his head.

The New York sport wanted to fight; his eyes showed this.

He saw the magnificent figure of the man who filled the saddle a few yards ahead, and his countenance told that he had already recognized him.

Captain Coldgrip was on deck again, and the two six-shooters that were thrust forward told Diamond Dan that the Gotham Vidocq meant business.

Slowly, and as he bit his lips the surprised New Yorker elevated his hands and said with a hoarse sullenness:

"I am forced to do this because you have the drop. You don't give your victims a chance, captain."

The moonlight falling full upon the mounted detective's face showed the speaker a smile of derision.

"A chance?" laughed Captain Coldgrip. "Diamond Dan of New York should be the last person to squeal. I am still on the old trail. You know when I first struck it, Diamond. The man at your side will wheel about and go back to Gold Eye."

Bronze Blake did not hesitate.

"That means this Colorado pilgrim," he said in tones heard by his companion. "I'll take you at yer word, captain, an' may I be stuffed with oysters! if I halt this side o' Angel Sam's ranch."

In a moment the gold camp guide was gone and Diamond Dan sent a curse after him.

Bronze Blake's flight was so sudden that he had forgotten the money he was to have for the narrative he had just spun for the New York sharp, and when the omission entered his head was nearly half a mile away and out of sight of his employer.

Captain Coldgrip came forward, looking over his revolvers into the face of the man who was waiting not very calmly for him.

"I was going to Gold Eye, Diamond," he said. "We would have met there if you had postponed your ride. I knew you were at the gold-diggings."

Diamond Dan gave a slight start.

"If you have been looking for me, captain," he said, "you need not go on to Gold Eye."

"Looking for you, eh? I don't deem you of that much importance just now."

These words were spoken with a smile.

"You look amazed," continued the detective, by this time at Diamond Dan's side, and with but one cocked revolver in sight. "I can assure you that to me you are not of much importance just now. I admit that you might prove dangerous under certain circumstances, but they are not at hand at this time. You have been to Gold Eye?"

"Yes," said the New York sport, frankly.

"You went there to find Richard Redhilt?"

Diamond Dan nodded.

"You came all the way from New York to see him. You got tired of waiting for a message from that old pard of yours. The one you sent him last winter—the one in which you warned him that I was on hand—dropped into my lap, and I thought I had finished the red-skin whom I overtook carrying it to you. You did not know what had happened until you reached Gold Eye? I can imagine your rage and disappointment."

"I don't think you can, captain," said Diamond Dan. "I might as well be frank with you, for you know more about a certain big scheme than thousands of others. I did not find Richard Redhilt at Gold Eye, but I found that infernal red Ishmaelite of his."

"Injun Nick!" laughed Captain Coldgrip.

"The Scarlet Hercules of the Madison Square Circus—the man whose feats of strength we used to applaud."

"Well, he gave you all the information you wanted, Diamond?"

"He gave me ten minutes to leave camp!" flashed the New Yorker, bitterly. "He said I had entered his territory without permission. By the souls of the immortal gods! if I had had half a chance I would have killed him. But, Jehu! you don't get chances on that Indian."

"Not very often," smiled Captain Coldgrip.

"When did you hear from the Centipede last?"

"Early in the winter."

"Do you know that he started to New York once?"

"In your care?—yes," and it was Diamond Dan's chance to smile.

"He got away from you by a railroad accident. I have been told this. He came back to Gold Eye, accompanied by his scarlet pard, and there—"

Diamond Dan paused abruptly at the threshold of a secret.

Captain Coldgrip was watching him closely.

"Why don't you go on, Diamond? I know who was in camp when Richard and his Indian got there. The girl, Bertha, could not wait for me at the place where I had left her. I promised her solemnly as a man and a detective, that I would run down the man who murdered her parents, and those who assisted him. I know that she had taken a terrible oath to avenge them herself. She could not wait for me, but all at once she left home and went to Denver on the hunt. There, by some means or other, she heard of a strange man in Gold Eye—a man with a scar on his cheek, and hiring one Hustling Hank as guide, she set out over the mountains. I learned all this after Richard Redhilt had escaped from me by means of the accident. Bertha the beautiful, as I call her, tried to carry out her oath when he came back to Gold Eye, but the hands of Injun Nick prevented. The next night she disappeared."

"And is missing yet?" asked Diamond Dan, leaning forward in his eagerness for the reply.

"Yes," said Captain Coldgrip, promptly.

"Then the Broadway Centipede is as shrewd in Colorado as in New York?"

"We will see who closes the game," the detective said. "The Indian knows where Richard is, and he will keep his secret. There is also another party who pretends to know, but I am convinced that he is in the dark. This is your old friend who got the money proceeds of the New York murderer."

"Luke Logan?"

"Yes, the Mormon sport. You will find him in Salt Lake if you are still desirous of going thither. He is a big man among the polygamous rats. I recollected that his arm was under

my chin and his knife above my heart when the terrible accident occurred between Eagle's Nest and Rocky Gulch. I wish you would go on to Salt Lake, Diamond. Your old pard who would give half his wealth to find Bertha, would welcome you in tip-top style. He has half a dozen detectives at work, but their keenness has failed to unearth Richard Redhilt and the girl. You would hardly know Luke now; he has grown stouter and, with his oily face, looks every inch a Mormon elder. But don't think that he has lost a whit of his cunning. He draws profits from half a dozen monte and faro banks, and his three wives are the most beautiful and dangerous sirens in the Mormon's purgatory. Yes, Diamond, go and see this pard of yours. If he does know what he pretends to, maybe you can worm the secret from him. If you find Bertha before I do, all right, but remember that you will have to hold her against Captain Coldgrip. The Mormon Spider wants to add her to the attractions of his gilded harem—she, the girl whose parents he helped out of the way for the money that laid the foundation of the fortune he enjoys. Then there is Richard Redhilt, the man who struck according to the plans of others—the hired assassin; he wants the girl for a game he knows how to play. He knows what Bertha Bethol is to a shrewd man like the Broadway Centipede. And last, but not least, here is my old acquaintance Diamond Dan, who has followed a certain lead all the way from New York, expecting to blossom out in the near future a gilded Nabob, with the dandiest wife above ground! Now," finished Captain Coldgrip with a laugh, "now isn't this a delightful lay-out, Diamond? You see, the middle of the game has not been reached. I have made one big play, and, but for an unforeseen accident on the rail, the Centipede, and perhaps his old New York pards in crime would not be able to breathe Colorado air at this moment. I am going to play a successful hand at the end. What if Injun Nick has been set by his master to baffle me? I know that a greater and more merciless foe than that red wolf no man can have. What if I find Richard Redhilt and his sworn satellites intrenched for me? I shall go straight to the game! You know the papers that were published after the New York crime; you have not forgotten that there is a reward for the Centipede, dead or alive, that it can be paid only in New York, and over the body of this modern demon. If you care to watch me, Diamond Dan, you will see me demand this reward!"

Diamond Dan could not but admire the enthusiasm of this man. He knew that his own name was mentioned in the offer of reward referred to by the Gotham Vidocq; he knew that some day he would have to fight for his life against Captain Coldgrip, but for all this he had to admire his sworn hunter.

"Go to Salt Lake," continued the detective, pointing suddenly down the trail. "Go and see your old pard, the Mormon Spider. The time may come when you will have to combine against the common foe. Just now I want to find Richard Redhilt's trail. I will find it."

"By watching Injun Nick?" queried Diamond Dan.

"No matter how, I will find it," was the determined reply. "Ah! I forget that you are a stranger in these parts. The man you had hired to guide you back to Alabaster City has deserted you. Let me guide you."

"You?" echoed Diamond Dan, aghast.

"Why not? I know the road; I've traveled it more than once since I left New York, oath-bound for a young girl's sake. Come, Diamond Dan; accept Captain Coldgrip as an escort. Aha! off we are for Alabaster!"

The last part of this singular interview the New York sport could hardly call real. It was the last event he had expected would take place.

When he fully collected his thoughts he was riding rapidly over the trail at Captain Coldgrip's side.

Alabaster City was thirty miles away. At the speed they were going the journey would occupy four hours, and a part of it would have to be made in the dark after the moon had gone down.

A gleam of rejoicing lit up Diamond Dan's eyes when he thought of this.

He said nothing, offered no objection to the detective escort, and rode on toward Alabaster with a carefully formed plan in his head.

Captain Coldgrip conversed pleasantly as the two horses left mile after mile behind. He talked of old times and old scenes in New York, recalled old places, and mentioned men whom the gambler-sport knew.

Diamond Dan had never seen him in such a jolly mood. He could not think that this man was one of the coolest man-hunters of the country, nor that some day he expected to deliver him (Diamond Dan) over to the law for participation in a crime that had shocked thousands.

Thus the pair rode on.

The moon, watched furtively by the eager New Yorker, went down, and the trail grew dark.

Diamond Dan was waiting for the opportunity. The horses were moving side by side over

the mountain road, and Alabaster City was no longer far away.

The Gotham sport drew rein in the gentlest manner possible. His horse obeyed the touch and fell back.

All at once his hand darted toward the hilt of the knife he carried.

It was out in a flash!

The next instant it was above his head, his fingers were wound vengefully about the hilt, and then—

"Some men are born fools!" laughed a voice and a hand as cold as ice closed at Diamond Dan's throat!

The uplifted blade dropped from his suddenly unnerved hand; he tried to shriek, but the effort died below fingers of ice.

The bloodless hand had been too quick for him!

When Diamond Dan came to his senses he was lying on a wooden platform with the cold light of morning on his face, and pinned to his breast was a piece of paper bearing these words:

"This man is bound for Salt Lake City."

CHAPTER X.

THE MORMON SPIDER IN LUCK.

"We are alone now and you can go on with your report. I have been waiting for you these many days and your eyes tell me that I have not waited in vain."

"I hope not. I have done the best I could. I think I have found the nest."

"And the bird?"

"Yes."

The speakers were two men who occupied chairs in an elegantly appointed room in one of the best known houses in Salt Lake City.

They were both middle aged men, one had a dark face adorned with a handsome black mustache, the face of the other was smooth, and his eyes were black and sparkling.

Everything in the room betokened wealth. It was in the home of Luke Logan, the Mormon Spider, and he it was who looked at the man before him and asked him with eagerness for his "report."

Between the two men was a table on which were bottles and glasses, and the man addressed by the Mormon helped himself before he began.

He then took out a roughly-drawn map of a mountainous district, and put his finger upon a certain spot.

"I've located 'im hyer," said the man as Luke leaned forward and looked closely.

"The camp is there, eh?" he asked.

"Yes."

The Mormon sport leaned back and waited for his detective to proceed.

"Richard Redhilt's companions are men whom he had about him at Gold Eye; there are nine of them," the man went on.

"Including Injun Nick?"

"I don't think that red devil is thar," was the answer. "The little camp is so deftly concealed that a bloodhound could hardly scent it. Richard Redhilt knew where to go when he left Gold Eye. I did not see the girl you have spoken of, but I will bet my head that she is not far away."

"Where he is she is to be found," said the Mormon, confidently. "Onyx Oil, you deserve an additional reward for your services and you shall have it. You came straight from the find?"

"Straight from it."

"Won't I drop a thunderbolt upon this quietude?" laughed Luke Logan, helping him to the contents of one of the bottles on the table.

"Why, six months ago I was trying to rescue Richard from Captain Coldgrip who wants both of us. I had my arm under his chin and my knife at his heart when the engine that drew our cars crashed against a boulder and sent us whirling to the bottom of a ravine. And he had the girl in Gold Eye at the time! By Jove! if I had known that, Captain Coldgrip could have dragged him on to New York. He got away from me soon after the accident and since then I have seen nothing of Richard Redhilt alias the Broadway Centipede. Now I will show him that keen eyes have found him. I will surprise him in his mountain labyrinth."

"Will you go in person?"

"I will intrust this game entirely to no one. It is too big to play by proxy. I have not yet dismissed you, Onyx Oil. We two will play the trick together. Salt Lake City can run without me for a while, and this establishment can get along without its sultan. I make a pretty good Mormon, they say." And the speaker laughed.

"I should say you do. You've struck it rich, and you don't have to watch any mountain gold mines either."

"Nary a mine," continued the Mormon sport laughing still. "I'm getting tired of this life, though. With the beautiful prize in my hands, I think I'll pull up stakes and try another climate."

Onyx Oil looked around the room and admired the magnificent appointments.

"I don't think I'd leave a cage like this," he said. "It's a regular palace."

"I'm able to build a dozen like it. I have two more, you know—one for each wife."

"An' ye'r' lookin' after a fourth, eh, colonel?"

"We'll let the future settle that," said the Mormon rising. "Come to me to-morrow at ten o'clock. Bring the map with you. I am not going to let grass grow under my feet. You have found the game and I want possession. By the old Harry! you have beaten Captain Coldgrip."

Three minutes later Luke Logan was the only occupant of the room, and when he came back from letting the detective out his eyes shone like diamonds.

"Found! found at last! I made no mistake when I employed that Colorado ferret. He has proved too much for you, Richard; he has found you and the prize for which I played in New York two years ago. He will come back to-morrow, and then I will lay the right plans. I am going to win the game in spite of all opposition. The Indian is not with you, Richard, Onyx says. Good for that! we won't have the red-skin to fight. I wonder if Captain Coldgrip is still on the trail; and Diamond Dan? He is still in Gotham, in blissful ignorance of the game we are playing in the West."

The last word had scarcely left the Mormon Spider's lips, when the door at his left opened, and a tall and splendid-looking man stood before him.

Luke Logan gave one stare, uttered a cry of astonishment and recoiled.

"I thought I didn't have to be announced," said the visitor, coming forward. "What! you haven't forgotten Diamond Dan since you became Mormon priest and millionaire? By Jove! Luke, you have a palace here! I haven't been in long—got here on the last train, but my first duty was to hunt you up."

The two men shook hands at the table, but it was apparent that the Mormon Spider wished his visitor at the Antipodes.

"I've had an experience," Diamond Dan went on when he had helped himself to a drink, without the semblance of an invitation. "I've just come from the hands of Captain Coldgrip."

The Mormon sport uttered an exclamation.

"I'll tell you how it was," he went on, dropping into one of the elegant arm-chairs, and for the next ten minutes he was telling the story of his adventures in Gold Eye, and his ride to Alabaster City with the man with the cold hand.

Luke Logan listened absorbed. It was to him a wild, strange story, and Diamond Dan was not interrupted to the end.

"This sleuth-hound is still after the old game, you see, Luke," said the New York sport. "He told me that he will not draw off till he has played it to a successful conclusion. He is quicker than a cat, for when I whipped out my knife to cut his heart-strings, I never dreamed that he saw me. He told me I'd find you here, and here I am ready to help beat Captain Coldgrip, Richard Redhilt or anybody else who opposes our interests. The girl is gone. You know she has been missing six months, since she dropped down upon Gold Eye, when nobody thought she was within a thousand miles of the camp. The will of her father's brother leaves her a big estate in New York. You don't want any more wealth, Luke. You've got enough, from all reports. It must be a daisy thing to play Mormon in this luscious style. What's the secret, Luke? You'll give it away to an old pard, won't you?"

"I'd give it to you in a minute if I could," said the Mormon. "I came here shortly after the New York game, struck it rich by accident, and then by a little shrewdness went up the ladder."

"You've got three wives, they say?"

Luke Logan laughed.

"They've made me famous," he said. "Diamond, I'll do the fair thing by you. I'll give you your choice."

"My choice of what?" asked the New Yorker astonished.

"Choice of my Cleopatras," smiled the Mormon.

"Jerusalem! what do I want with a wife when I'm at the bottom of the ladder financially?" cried Diamond Dan. "Why do you want to discard?"

Luke leaned forward and laid his hand on his old companion's arm.

"I may want to take another," he said in lowered voice as his eyes glittered. "My wives are the prettiest women in Utah. One's from Santa Fe, another from Cuba and the third was a rancher's widow when I got her."

"Jupiter Pluvius! no she-vipers in mine, Luke!" cried Diamond Dan. "I didn't come here to rob you. Keep your wives, and your money, for that matter. I may go ahead and play a little game of my own, and some day, maybe, I'll be a bonanza king, but never among the Mormons."

Luke Logan's countenance suddenly became serious.

"Do you mean that you are going to hunt Richard Redhilt, with his pards and Injun Nick to baffle you?" he asked.

"Why shouldn't I? You don't think I came from New York for nothing, eh?"

"Let the Broadway Centipede go," said the

Mormon. "Captain Coldgrip may find all of us one of these days. I believe he knows where I am—"

"He does!" exclaimed the New Yorker.

"Very well. I am waiting quietly for him to show up here. When he does he'll need a deadlier weapon than that bloodless hand of his. What do I care for the girl now? I am satisfied to have Richard Redhilt keep away. I always expected to see that fellow turn blackmailer. If he is contented in his unknown quarters with Bertha, why, we should not growl. Diamond."

Was this man in earnest? Diamond Dan watched him narrowly while he spoke.

"You cannot deceive me, Luke Logan, but yet your countenance shows no guile," he said to himself. "Captain Coldgrip told me that you have had men hunting for Richard Redhilt and the girl. He ought to know, and yet you sit there and tell me that Bertha, the Beautiful, is nothing to you now. I know you almost as well as I know myself. You was a serpent in New York; you are nothing less in Utah. You have lied all through the piece to-night—you are not glad to see me, you wouldn't part with one of your wives, and you want to find the girl, Bertha."

"You will be my guest here, Diamond Dan," suddenly continued Luke, the Mormon. "You will make my house your abode. Stay as long as you please. We have some dandy games here, and you know all the tricks of the tiger. After your long ride from Alabaster, and especially after feeling Captain Coldgrip's fingers behind your windpipe, you no doubt want rest. Let me show you to little better quarters than we used to inhabit on the Bowery."

Diamond Dan interposed no objections.

He wanted a quiet time to lay his plans since he had seen the Mormon Spider, and then he was tired, too.

Therefore, he let Luke the Mormon show him to a magnificent bed-chamber, furnished with a sideboard that contained the choicest of liquors.

"Who ever thought that Luke Logan would become a Mormon Vanderbilt?" ejaculated the astonished sport when the Spider had wished him good-night. "This room is worth more than I've seen for six months, and yet he wants what the girl is worth—I know he does. Well, by the thrones of Tartarus! he sha'n't have it!"

It was some time before the New York sport disrobed and got into the soft bed that awaited him, and it was longer still ere he closed his eyes.

At last he fell asleep, however, and forgot the man who had "welcomed" him to Salt Lake.

How long his slumber lasted he did not know. He suddenly found himself wide awake. A light was shining into his room from a transom above the foot of the bed.

As he looked he remembered having seen a door there before he retired.

"Is the next room Luke's?" he asked himself, and then he got up and drew himself up to the transom.

For a moment he saw nothing to startle him, then he found himself looking down into a room larger and more splendidly furnished than the one he occupied, and near a sumptuous dressing-stand stood the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

She was the sole tenant of the apartment.

Her figure was a little above the medium height, well rounded and faultless in every particular. Her skin was olive in complexion, and her eyes were sparkling and dark.

The dress she wore told Diamond Dan that she must have come in from the open air, and he knew it was past midnight. In her hands she held a piece of paper which the watching sport could see was covered with lines like a map.

Her eyes flashed upon it a look of triumph.

"A hundred to one that this is the Cuban wife Luke spoke of," muttered the New Yorker as he gazed.

"He didn't think that I would swoop down upon his clew!" she suddenly exclaimed. "He won't suspect me, but if he tries again he will discover that I want no more rivals. I fancy that he will wait till past ten o'clock for the man who brought this paper to Salt Lake. I told him when he brought me here that I was a viper when crossed. Who is this girl he wants? A child whose parents were murdered in New York two years ago. I hold the key to her whereabouts, and the hand that drew this map will never draw another!"

She put the little map into her bosom, and drew a dagger whose slender sheath bespoke a delicate blade.

Diamond Dan's eyes grew large with wonder while he watched.

He saw her unsheath the dagger and draw it across a lady's handkerchief. A red trail was left behind.

"Great Caesar!" ejaculated the sport. "That map cost somebody his life. This must be the wife Luke wanted me to take."

CHAPTER XI.

A BEATEN MORMON.

THE next day found Luke Logan, the Mormon Spider, waiting for his detective and the map he had showed him the night before.

Diamond Dan, who had not ceased to think of

the woman and the dagger, had left the Mormon's house and was taking in the city until time to have another interview with his old pard.

Ten o'clock came, and the Mormon sport watched the door of his elegant residence with a great deal of interest.

Onyx Oil, his detective, did not come.

"The fellow promised to come!" he exclaimed, out of patience. "I want to get to the trail as soon as possible. Richard Redhilt and the girl must be found."

He waited half an hour longer, and then left the house.

"I know where he stops when in Salt Lake," he muttered. "If Onyx Oil has failed me purposely, he shall learn that the Mormon Spider is not a child to be trifled with."

In a certain quarter of the Mormon capital stood a rather large frame hotel, which was largely patronized by men of Onyx Oil's class, gold miners and genteel toughs generally.

Luke Logan went to the Grand Utah, as the hotel was called, and inquired for his man, who was well known there.

"Not up yet," said the clerk,

The Mormon expressed his astonishment.

"You can go up and see, sir—Room 33—second floor. Can't miss it."

Biting his lips and inwardly cursing Onyx Oil's tardiness, the Mormon climbed the stairs.

He found the designated door without trouble as the clerk had told him. It was closed, but not locked.

Luke Logan did not hesitate to enter, and the next moment he stood in a small room through whose windows a warm sun was shining.

A man was lying across the bed—a large man with clothes and boots on.

The first glimpse drove the stalwart Mormon forward, and he leaned over the man.

"Onyx—Jupiter Jove! The man is dead!"

It had taken the Mormon but a few seconds to make this discovery, for the staring eyes and the ashen face of the occupant of the bed told him in a flash that death had been there.

It took Luke a minute to recover his composure.

If his mountain detective was dead, where was the map? Had he been murdered for a little thing like that?

"I'll settle this map business," he said aloud, answering his mental questions, and then his hand dived beneath the dead man's jacket.

"Gone!" he cried, starting back. "This man was killed for the map that locates Richard Redhilt and the girl. Why didn't I take possession of it last night? What a fool I was!"

He did not search the room, for the condition of the pocket into which he had seen the precious map thrust told him that it had been taken.

"The next thing to be done is to find the person who did this," he said. "Diamond Dan got in last night, but not until after this man had left me. I cannot accuse Diamond. Did Captain Coldgrip beat him to Salt Lake? That is not impossible. This sleuth is a cool, active fellow, and is quite capable of doing almost impossible things. If I had taken the map last night the assassin would have got nothing. I hate myself for my short-sightedness. By Jupiter! I deserve to lose the game, but I will not!"

He left the dead man in the little room and went down-stairs. It would not do for him to pass out without raising the alarm; he was too prominent a person in Salt Lake to do an act of this kind.

So he walked to the clerk's desk and asked that worthy if he knew that the occupant of Room 33 was dead.

"Dead?" echoed the clerk, in horrified accents that reached the ears of everybody in the office.

"Dead—murdered," said Luke. "I had an engagement with him at my house, but as he did not come, I came to him. Yes, sir, the Grand Utah has got a dead lodger."

In an instant there was a stampede up-stairs and while a dozen men were looking at Onyx Oil, the Mormon sport was walking away.

He went home and found Diamond Dan enjoying a cigar in the magnificent apartment, where they had met the night before.

Luke fixed on his New York pard a pair of piercing eyes.

Did Diamond Dan know anything about the murder at the Grand Utah? Had he come to Salt Lake on the trail of Onyx Oil in hopes of wresting from him the important map?

The New Yorker stood the scrutiny well.

"This man knows nothing of it," said the Mormon sport to himself. "He is anxious to find Bertha Bethol and her guard, but I cannot accuse him of the murder of Onyx Oil." And his thoughts went back accusingly to Captain Coldgrip again.

"You're a boss hyer, Luke," suddenly laughed Diamond Dan. "By Jehosaphat! if I war fixed like you thar's no bonanza that'd allure me."

"I don't think I want another."

"Mebbe when Brigham dies they'll make you head saint o' the Mormon church," continued the New York sport. "An' if they ever do that, Luke, remember that I'm a candidate for an office nigh the altar—ha, ha!"

The Mormon Spider was in no laughing mood

There was a mad flash in his eyes which must have told Diamond Dan that something had gone wrong.

All at once he leaned toward the new arrival and asked:

"Are you certain that Captain Coldgrip went back toward Gold Eye after your failure to kill him?"

"No, I am not," was the reply. "You recollect that I told you that when I came to my senses, I was lying on the railroad platform in Alabaster City placarded for this place?"

"You told me that last night."

"Well, as I was choked senseless by that bloodless hand, how did I get to Salt Lake unless he brought me to Alabaster?"

"That is true," said the Mormon sport. "Then—"

He stopped as if he was encroaching on dangerous territory.

"Do you think that the captain is in Salt Lake?" asked Diamond Dan almost starting from the chair.

"I can't say where he is," answered Luke with a smile. "That devil is very hard to locate."

"If he is here I'll locate him before night!" flashed the Gotham sport. "He has choked me for the last time! He may have an eye in the back of his head, but I will get even with him for his infernal grip. In Salt Lake City at this time? I want no better employment than this. By the houries of heaven! I'll run Captain Coldgrip down and pay him for the cold clutch between Gold Eye and Alabaster."

Down upon the table with startling emphasis came the bronzed hand of the speaker who left his chair and faced Luke the Mormon with angry mien.

"Don't be so fast," said the Mormon. "I do not say that the captain has come to town. However, Diamond, if you want to put in any time hunting him, I shall not object, only you do not want to couple my name to his. Remember that here I am a thorough follower of Brigham Young and his doctrines, and I am not known as a New York sport."

"I will not forget that. We have been pards too long to betray one another. By the way, I slept splendidly last night. Which one of your queens inhabit this place?"

"Ninez the Cuban woman," said Luke the Mormon. "If you will content yourself here for a minute I will introduce you."

A singular light appeared in Diamond Dan's eyes as the Salt Lake sport turned away.

"It wouldn't do to tell him what I saw last night," murmured the New Yorker. "He seems rather proud of the Cuban part of his harem, but I'll bet my purse that he'll be anxious to get rid of her one o' these days. Wait here for her, Luke? Of course I will. I'm anxious to meet the Cleopatra I saw last night with the dagger and the map."

The Mormon sport was already gone and Diamond Dan was alone. Five minutes later he heard voices beyond the room and then Luke appeared leading the beautiful woman whom he called his wife.

Diamond Dan could hardly suppress an exclamation of astonishment, such a change had come over the woman since he saw her last.

She was now arrayed in magnificent costume which seemed to lighten her wonderful beauty and lent a new sparkle to her dark eyes.

This was the woman he had lately seen in common garments, and in that very house with a crimson dagger in her hand!

The introduction was formal, but Diamond Dan saw that in her obeisance Ninez was looking through her long lashes.

"What do you think of her?" asked the Mormon sport when the woman had swept from the room with the dignity of a tropic queen.

"She's a regular daisy," exclaimed Diamond Dan, but not without the dagger appearing before his eyes. "Are the other two like her, Luke?"

"Not as beautiful, Diamond. Ninez is the choice of the lot. Have you forgotten what I said last night?"

Diamond Dan was silent, and seemed to be refreshing his memory.

"I told you," said Luke stepping suddenly forward and lowering his voice to a confidential strain, "I told you, you know, that I would give you your choice of the beauties of my establishments. You have seen one of them. What do you say, Diamond? Could you turn Mormon for a woman like Ninez?"

"A fellow could turn anything for her one would think, but, please excuse me, Luke. I don't want anything to interfere with my little hunt for Bertha."

A dark frown settled on Luke Logan's countenance; he threw a hasty glance toward the door through which Ninez had just passed, as if he had heard a noise there.

"You don't want to make a fool of yourself, Diamond," he said. "The girl is gone. Long ago she became the wife of Richard Redhilt."

"How do you know?" flashed the Gotham sport. "That man killed her parents. She would naturally loathe the ground he treads. If you give me time I will prove that she is not the Centipede's wife."

"Remember that Captain Coldgrip is on the same trail."

"Captain Coldgrip be hanged!" cried Diamond Dan, raising his voice. "You have only increased my desire to find Bertha the Beautiful. I will do it against the plots of Richard Redhilt and the coolness of this New York sleuth-hound who hopes some day to hand three of us over to Eastern justice. You have raised my suspicions that he is now in Salt Lake City. I hope he is. By Jupiter! I want him out of the way at the beginning of the game, and then though Richard Redhilt has taken the girl to the jungles of Asia, I will play the last cards successfully! I thank you, Luke. I will find my queen beyond your palaces. Ninez is beautiful, but Diamond Dan doesn't want a tigress on his hands just now."

The somewhat excited New Yorker gave the last sentence an ending not intended.

He expected to hear an outburst of wrath from Luke the Mormon, but instead it was met by a laugh.

"You're a good judge of women, Diamond," said the Salt Lake sport. "If you think Captain Coldgrip is in the city, go and find him. If you propose to extinguish this mutual enemy of ours the quicker you find him the better."

Diamond Dan walked from the Mormon's house with resolution. Could it be that the man of the bloodless hand was so near?

He longed to find Captain Coldgrip—to see him first without being seen himself. He wanted the drop on this clever tracker, and he said as he walked away that he would finish Captain Coldgrip before night if fortune would only put him on the trail.

He was not long finding out that a man had been killed in his room at the Grand Utah the night before—killed with a dagger in the hands of some unknown person, the accounts said. Diamond Dan started at the intelligence, and when he learned that Luke the Mormon was the discoverer of the deed, he laughed triumphantly.

"They were friends, they understood each other," he ejaculated. "Onyx Oil was killed for the map I saw last night and that map is the key to Bertha. It is plain to me now. The Cuban tigress showed her claws in a game of her own playing. I don't wonder that Luke is willing to get rid of that woman. I would be like him if she was my wife. I think I see a streak of luck. At any rate, I know where to look for the map. After I get that—Bertha!"

Diamond Dan was in ecstasies.

He had not come to Mormondom for nothing.

CHAPTER XII.

AN EASY VICTORY.

THE day passed and offered no solution of the mystery that surrounded the death of Onyx Oil, daggered and robbed at the Grand Utah.

Intent on getting the map Diamond Dan went back to the Mormon sport's house at sundown.

During the day he had been on the lookout for Captain Coldgrip, but had failed to obtain a glimpse of that person.

If the New York detective had come to Salt Lake, he was keeping himself very close to the man who wanted to get the drop on him.

Luke the Mormon had told Diamond Dan to make his house his home during his stay in the city yet at the same time he hoped that something would occur to take the sport away.

When the Gotham sport reached the house at sundown he was admitted like a privileged person. He wondered where Ninez was and whether the precious diagram was still concealed in her bosom.

He went to the room in which he had spent most of his time in the house and found it empty. He did not think that the Mormon Spider had visited it since his departure, though the liquor decanters on the tray had been replenished and the glasses cleaned.

Diamond Dan proceeded to help himself and without stint, for the liquor was good and free, and he was dry.

He wondered if the Mormon's Cuban wife was in the house.

"I'm here to make a ten strike or fail," said Diamond Dan to himself. "With that map in my hands, I can walk straight to the Gotham bonanza. Luke is still hunting for the person who killed Onyx Oil. He never thinks of looking at home for the key to the crime. I am told that sometimes he doesn't visit Ninez for a week, therefore there is no certainty about his coming home to-night."

Diamond Dan was not disturbed in his meditations. He had liquor and cigars at his disposal and while he enjoyed both, he saw the hours slip away.

In all this time not a sound had come from another part of the house to tell him that it was inhabited, and at last Diamond Dan began to fear that he was the only living person it contained.

This fear at last began to crystallize into a belief, and it was nine o'clock when he consulted his watch and jumped up.

He had not taken liquor enough to unman him; he had just enough on to nerve him for the most desperate plays.

"Now for the key to Bertha and Richard Redhilt or the Broadway Centipede!" he exclaimed. "If Ninez is beneath this roof I will find her and play my first hand in Utah."

Diamond Dan had already noticed that the doors of the Mormon's house opened and shut without sound.

Every square inch of the floor was heavily carpeted and the heaviest footstep emitted no noise.

Diamond Dan knew where to find the room he had occupied the preceding night, and he remembered that the apartment in which he had seen Ninez adjoined it.

The hall into which the New York sharp let himself after leaving the room, was wide and dimly lighted, but he could see the stairway that led to the landing he was obliged to seek. He went up two steps at a time and almost noiselessly.

"She gives me the map or—"

Diamond Dan did not finish the sentence, but his eyes and the emphasis with which the words were spoken were ending enough.

He almost started when he saw a light beyond the transom of the Mormon Cleopatra's room.

"She is there," he said to himself. "Now, Diamond, play one of your winning hands. This is not New York, but Utah, but though two years have passed, the stake is the same."

He glided toward the door with the tread of the practiced burglar, and the next moment was listening intently with one ear against the boards.

He heard a slight noise but no voice, then he caught the door-frame above and drew his body up.

In a moment he was looking down into that room for the second time, and his eyes had again found its beautiful occupant of the night before.

"By Jove! I'm just in time," he said to himself. "Ninez is preparing to go abroad."

The Mormon wife wore the plain and close-fitting garments he had seen her in when he beheld her from his bedroom. The elegant robes in which Luke had presented her had been exchanged for those more suited to travel.

She stood before a mirror arranging the last details of her toilet, and when she turned away Diamond dropped lightly to the floor.

Mechanically he laid his hand on the knob.

To his surprise it turned and the next moment he stood before the Mormon queen.

"You?" exclaimed Ninez starting back as her eyes seemed to flash indignantly.

"Diamond Dan," said the sharp with a smile. "I knew you were in the house, but I did not intend to disturb you," she answered. "Well, what is it?"

She seemed to take it for granted that the sleek tough had come for something. She knew that a man who had been Luke Logan's pard in New York was not unlikely to display some villainy in Utah.

For a moment Diamond Dan looked at the woman with the eyes of a shrewd schemer, and in that little space of time he tried to plan his attack.

"I want to help you," he said at last. "You don't want Luke to take up with this new female divinity, eh?"

The woman could not keep back a cry.

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed, and Diamond Dan feeling that his shaft had gone to the center of the target dropped coolly into the nearest chair and smiled.

"I mean this new Helen that is somewhat," he went on. "I am talking about this young runaway wife of mine—this woman whom I have tracked from the East—this—"

"Your wife?" exclaimed Ninez. "What! this girl called Bertha your wife, Diamond Dan?"

"That's just what she is," was the response. "Your husband is fascinated with her. He knows that she is with a man called Richard Redhilt, but the pair have been lost for some time. I had the trail awhile ago. I had in my possession a map which told me where she was but I was robbed—robbed by the very man who died suddenly last night at the Grand Utah in this city."

"That man?" cried Ninez. "Are you certain he robbed you?"

"I am. His name was Onyx Oil and he robbed me of the map. Let me lay my fingers on it again and I will go straight to her. By the eternal heavens! she will never desert another husband and Luke Logan shall never add her to his establishment."

Diamond Dan could not help seeing the wild delight that flashed in the woman's eyes as he spoke.

Before she replied she shut the door which he had left slightly ajar and locked it.

A thrill went to the sharper's heart when the lock clicked.

"What will you do when you find your—this girl called Bertha?" asked Ninez, halting before the New York sport.

"I'll show her a tiger's teeth and a tiger's claws—I'll go bail if I don't!" cried Diamond Dan. "You don't want her to appear on the surface now and I don't blame you. You've got things fixed well here; they say you're the

prettiest woman west o' the Kansas line and I'm willing to swear to it. You know that Luke is looking for this—for my wife. He apparently welcomed me when I came, but he guessed my mission, and all the time he wished that Captain Coldgrip had finished me between Gold Eye and Alabaster. I can't get along without the map which was taken from Onyx Oil last night." And Diamond Dan looked at Ninez with eyes that said: "I know where it is, too."

She understood him.

"If you get it will you do two things?" she asked, eagerly.

"What are they?"

"First, will you start at once without seeing Luke?"

"I'll go bail if I don't!"

"Second, will you swear that this girl shall never cross my path?"

"Yes."

"Will you make the Mormon nabob believe that she is dead?"

"I can do that, too," said Diamond Dan, eagerly.

He was willing to promise anything for the map. He would have lied his soul away to have felt it in his hand.

"I came from Cuba but you may know this," the Mormon queen went on. "If I found this girl I would kill her without mercy. I will see no more women step between me and the man whose wife I am. Two are there already and they never let me see them tremble. I was about to start out on this hunt when you came. I intended to find this person who has infatuated him, and for whom he has had half a dozen detectives hunting. I have known this a long time. I once thought of uniting with the man called Captain Coldgrip, but he hunts my husband as well as the girl Bertha. I am going to trust you, Diamond Dan."

How the eyes of the city shark gleamed when this announcement was made! He could hardly sit still in the chair.

"I have the clew," Ninez went on. "I have the missing map. You need not ask me how I obtained it, but it is here!" And the woman's hand dropping suddenly from her bosom showed Diamond Dan the piece of paper worth twenty times its weight in gems.

"Take it and serve me!" she said. "Go to this wife of yours, choke her, dagger her—anything to get her out of my way! I overheard you call me a tigress to my Mormon husband. I am nothing less, and the discovery of this rival has fired my blood. Do you swear to find her?"

Diamond Dan leaped from his chair and threw up his right hand.

"May I never see paradise if I don't!" he cried.

"But you will take her back to New York, and he—"

"He will never find her!" interrupted the sharp. "I guess I've played a few deep games with cold decks in my time."

He held out his hand for the map and felt it fall into his palm.

"I've got the only hand that can win!" he said to himself. "It didn't cost me any blood, either. This is an easier victory than I expected."

"Remember! you go to-night—now!" said Ninez, glancing at a gold watch. "There is a train going out of the city within the next hour. As you have had the map once, you ought to know something about it."

"I do, but I was robbed before I got the proper hang o' the thing," was the reply. "I'll take up the threads with a little help, and then you'll see me surprise somebody."

"You don't want to fail," said the Mormon's wife, warningly. "If I did not know that Luke Logan does not want to see you here, I might mistrust you. But go! The trail is now in your hands. You want to find this woman, mind you; you don't want to let me get after her. As certain as there is a hereafter, Ninez the Mormon will slay!"

Diamond Dan had the prize and was anxious to quit the place.

The Mormon Spider might come, and this was an event he did not want to take place.

Ninez unlocked the door and let him out. He went to the room below and drank to the success of his game.

He did not think of Captain Coldgrip now, for he alone had the key to Bertha's whereabouts. The gold game was going in favor of Diamond Dan.

He found himself on the street at last, and the door of the Mormon house was shut behind him.

The map was safe in a pocket near his heart, and there it would stay. He mentally swore that all the imps of Tartarus could not take it from him.

"That was about the slickest lie I ever spun," laughed the New York sharp when he moved away. "I went to the Cuban's room prepared to do anything, and I didn't have to show a claw for the map. It dropped into my lap like a ripe peach. I never saw such an easy game. If the rest of it is no harder than this, I shall be in luck."

Diamond Dan's intention was to get out of Salt Lake as quickly as possible, so as to get a chance to give the map a thorough study.

His brain seemed to feel the thrill of his victory; he started away with eager strides.

All at once he stopped and drew back with an ejaculation which he fortunately suppressed at his lips.

A man had passed under a lamp across the narrow street that separated them.

He had seen him but a moment, but that was enough to halt him in his tracks.

"Luke the Mormon knew more than he intimidated when he asked me whether Captain Coldgrip went back to Gold Eye," he said to himself. "The man is in Salt Lake City. I have just seen him; but I have the clew, and he dies if he follows me!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE GOLD BUTTON.

If Richard Redhilt and Bertha the Beautiful had disappeared mysteriously from Gold Eye, they had not vanished from human sight.

Let us transport the reader to a certain place in the San Juan Mountains, not far from the New Mexican line, and show him there a group of little cabins which it would be hard for the coyote or the eagle to find.

No beaten trail leads to the place, and the gold prospector does not penetrate it in search of new leads.

Richard Redhilt's two years' sojourn in Colorado had given him a wonderful knowledge of the country. Gold Eye was by no means the only place he knew, and when he quit it, after his escape from Captain Coldgrip, he founded this new hiding-place in the San Juan country.

The New York sport was a thorough Western desperado, and as the reader knows that the oath-bound men who were his pards in Gold Eye followed him, he will expect to find them all in the new camp.

It is a warm midsummer night, and a handsome man, handsome despite a scar on one of his cheeks, emerges from a cabin, and is met by a person his counterpart in physical perfection, though not as good looking.

"Look here, captain," says the man, addressing Richard Redhilt. "Little Lot picked this up outside o' camp awhile ago," and he displays a small gold button, at sight of which the eyes of the Broadway Centipede fairly snap.

The next moment Richard is examining the button in the soft starlight, but, not satisfied, he goes back into the cabin, and resumes the close scrutiny in the light of a lamp.

"Where is Little Lot?" he asks, suddenly turning to the person who was waiting quietly.

"In his shanty."

The next moment Richard Redhilt is walking rapidly away, and all at once he dashes into a cabin without ceremony.

A man is discussing a very frugal supper at a very rough table not big enough for two, and he starts when he sees the Centipede before him.

"You found this?—where?" asks Richard, displaying the button.

"Under the big tree up on the mountain."

"When?"

"Just about sundown. I found it accidentally," and then the man who is the smallest person in the camp, and called Little Lot, asks avariciously: "It is gold, captain?"

"Yes, gold," snaps Richard Redhilt. "I used to know a man who had a streak of luck once, and who, to be odd, ordered a dozen buttons like this."

"In Colorado, captain?"

"No, in New York!"

Little Lot does not speak, but goes back to his supper, while Richard leans forward and examines the find as closely as before.

"I can't be mistaken, but I cannot think he is here," says he, unconsciously, and aloud.

Little Lot looks up.

"Captain Coldgrip?" he asks.

"No."

"He had gold buttons, I b'lieve."

"So he had, but other men could afford them. I would like to hear from Gold Eye, from the North generally," says Richard, and then he suddenly fixes his eye on Little Lot, who has just finished his supper, because there was nothing more before him.

"Lot?"

"Well, captain?"

"You start for Gold Eye."

The dwarfish member of the banded league starts, but utters no remonstrance. He knows the man who has just spoken.

"I want to know whether the wearer of this button has appeared there," Richard Redhilt goes on. "Injun Nick is on guard there. He will know whether the man has haunted Gold Eye. Then, I want to know also whether Captain Coldgrip has turned up since we left and whether all is quiet in Mormondom. You will tell Injun Nick that a gold button has been found in the vicinity of Camp Bonanza—you will describe it to him, and if you watch close you will see that red-skin's eyes flash. This is important, Lot. I send you because you found the button and can describe it accurately. Now, without more ado, you will make your way to Gold Eye by the safest route. You know Captain Coldgrip at sight;

you once saw the man known in Salt Lake as the Mormon Nabob; but the owner of this button you have never seen."

"Who is he, captain?"

"A man called Diamond Dan in New York. I don't know what he calls himself here. Do you think the button had been lost lately?"

"I can not say," Little Lot. "It might have been thar for weeks for anything I know. Diamond Dan you say is this button-owner's handle?"

"That is what we called him in New York. He has changed it no doubt. I did not expect to hear of him here. He never seemed to possess any detective qualities. If he is here I know his mission. Don't forget a word I have told you for Injun Nick."

"I'll hang if I do," ejaculates Little Lot and he pushes his bench back to find himself alone.

Richard Redhilt with a good deal of excitement visible on his countenance, is already many strides from the shanty.

"I don't want this man here," he mutters.

"By heavens! I believe I would sooner hear of the young man we caught in the spring and lynched on the mountain—the Gold Eye galoot called Silver Silas, the girl's friend. In fortune's name, how did Diamond Dan's button get here? Who gave him the clew that he has followed? If he came all the way from New York to find the Gotham bonanza he will never boast of success in our Bowery haunts. Some men go many miles to their grave-yards. Beware! Diamond Dan! You don't want to interfere with the quiet game of the Broadway Centipede. The sting has lost none of its poison."

Richard Redhilt is back in his cabin again and despite the warm night the door is closely shut.

"Diamond had his gold buttons made to order—after a freak of his own," he says to himself as he looks at the button again. "More than once he has carried small diamonds in them and sometimes papers more valuable still. They had a way of unscrewing, his buttons had. Let me see whether this is a duplicate or one of the original."

All at once Richard gives utterance to an exclamation of joy and surprise, and the next moment the button lies in two pieces in his hand!

That portion containing the shank is deep, and filled with paper, which is very thin.

The quick eye of the sport discovered marks which caused him to lift the paper out. He spread it out on the table before him and leans forward.

"Jupiter Pluvius! it is a map of Camp Bonanza!" he exclaimed. "The hand that drew it knew what it was doing. Is this Diamond Dan's work? Where is Little Lot? I have an additional mission for him."

Richard Redhilt went back to Little Lot's cabin, but it was empty, and there were evidences to his practiced eye that the little rough had already departed.

"Let him go!" he said, turning away. "We will prepare here for the game this man Diamond Dan is playing. The boys must know it at once."

Ten minutes later in one of the cabins of Camp Bonanza ten or twelve men were congregated.

A large tin lamp on a shelf fastened to the wall revealed their splendid figures and dark, brown faces. They all faced Richard Redhilt, and were waiting for him to speak.

"We've been found out," said the Centipede.

"Just about sundown Little Lot found a gold button under the big tree on the mountain. I don't know when it was lost, but from its appearance I judge it had not been there long. In this button I found a complete diagram of Camp Bonanza and its approaches."

These words produced a sensation.

"Whose button was it?" asked a man in the front of the crowd.

A smile appeared at the corners of Richard Redhilt's mouth.

"I am able to answer that question," he said. "I saw that button worn for the first time. It was made for Diamond Dan, whose photograph adorns the rogues' gallery in New York."

The speaker did not think it necessary to state that his portrait was there, too.

"The owner of this button when I saw him last," continued the Centipede, "was a fine-looking man about forty, built like myself, dark eyes, black hair and a big mustache. He may be altered in appearance now, but that makes no difference! We don't want him here."

"No!" said two-thirds of the crowd with emphasis, and then some one asked:

"Is he as dangerous as Captain Coldgrip?"

"He hasn't the captain's coolness on all occasions, but he is a dangerous man," said Richard. "This gold button gives him away. It betrays his mission to me as surely as if he had come and told me. Camp Bonanza must be guarded better than ever. This man, Diamond Dan, must find his game blocked right away."

"Shot on sight, eh, captain?"

"Not if he can be caught and brought to me. I want to know of his capture five minutes before I meet him."

"You shall, but if we can't corral him—what?"

Richard Redhilt's eyes got a new light as he answered.

"Shoot him dead!"

In a little while the meeting dispersed, and it is safe to say that Camp Bonanza had a lot of watchful eyes in it.

As for Richard Redhilt, he was the most watchful of all. His look told him that the finding of the hollow button was a lightning flash from a clear sky. Diamond Dan whom he had left in New York, was the last man he expected to hear of in the San Juan country.

By what means had he got possession of the camp map? Had he made it himself?

Of course Richard did not know about the events which had lately taken place in Salt Lake City, the death of Onyx Oll, the theft of the map by Ninez, the Mormon beauty, and Diamond Dan's shrewd game.

He looked at his revolvers when he went back to his cabin, as if he expected hot work foretold by the button.

"Woe to the hound that has scented us!" he hissed. "I war just getting ready to play the biggest hand of the whole game, and now this old pard comes. We have outwitted Captain Coldgrip, we have baffled Luke Logan's Mormon detectives, but Diamond Dan has run us down. Don't I know what he wants?—a divide, which no man shall have! He came here without disturbing Injun Nick, left on guard at Gold Eye. Little Lot will have company back, for my red right bower will leave his post. I may need him here."

The last sentence had hardly finished itself on Richard Redhilt's lips when the door of his cabin opened without the ceremony of a knock, and the Centipede sprung up with a cry.

"Jerusalem! You here?" he exclaimed as his eyes dilated with wonder.

"Why not, old pard?" laughed the new-comer, who was the Centipede's equal in build and handsome like him, but with no tell-tale scar on his cheek. "Didn't think you could hide from me, eh? Give me your hand. By Jove! I haven't seen you since you left New York. You look like you used to, Rob, only the mountain air and sun have bronzed you."

Richard Redhilt glared at the man who held out his hand while there was an unconcealed gleam of triumph in his eyes.

The owner of the gold button had come; he had walked boldly into his cabin, and when he was not looking for him he was face to face with Diamond Dan.

Found at last!

The Broadway Centipede threw toward the door a glance that was not hard to read.

"You don't seem to welcome me," continued the New York sharp. "We ought to be friends, after what happened in the East. I'm here to stand by you in every thing. If Captain Coldgrip comes he will have two to tackle. I understand that he took you last winter from Gold Eye."

"Who told you?" snapped the scarred sport. Before Diamond Dan could reply, the door flew open, as if a hurricane had struck it.

Richard Redhilt uttered a startled cry, and the New Yorker turned, to see a man leap toward him like a tiger.

The next second Diamond Dan found himself forced against the logs of the shanty, and two hands were at his throat, while a pair of eyes blazed before him like rival fire-balls.

Strong though he was, he had found his match, and his mad assailant was Injun Nick!

CHAPTER XIV.

DIAMOND DAN'S SENTENCE.

"In the clutches of this Indian devil again!" grated Diamond Dan. "What am I to do?"

Injun Nick had appeared on the scene at a moment when he was supposed to be far away.

Gold Eye no longer held Richard Redhilt's red right bower; he was in Camp Bonanza, and his hands were at the New York sharper's throat.

Diamond Dan tried to talk, but the fingers of the Indian had taken his breath. He could only look over the red-skin's shoulder and put in a mute appeal for mercy. And mercy was the one thing which Injun Nick and the man beyond seemed not inclined to grant.

"I didn't look for a cold deck of this sort. I came here to play a cute little game of my own making, but here I am, pinned to the wall by the hound that barked me out of Gold Eye."

At last Richard Redhilt showed signs of interference. When he thought Injun Nick had choked Diamond Dan almost into insensibility, he went forward and caught his arm.

"Enough! You will kill him if you keep on," he said, and Diamond Dan felt his throat released and he was no longer pinned to the logs.

Injun Nick liberated his prisoner reluctantly. He seemed to take great delight in choking him severely, but he drew off with eyes still flashing while the throttled sport kept his feet with difficulty.

"Do you approve of this brutality?" asked Diamond Dan, when he found his voice. "Why didn't you pull your red bull-dog from my throat, Richard?"

The boss of Camp Bonanza smiled.

"He came in like a cyclone, you see, Diamond," he said. "I wasn't looking for him. You have probably met before since you left New York."

"I met him in Gold Eye. He got the upper hand of me there and drove me from camp."

All this time Injun Nick stood with his back to the door, and his glances were alternating between the two sports.

He was ready at the slightest signal from Richard Redhilt to hurl himself again upon Diamond Dan.

"You've heard what I said, Richard," the New York sharp went on. "I don't like to be choked, especially by an Injun."

Injun Nick took a quick stride toward the speaker.

"Shall I, captain?" he said, with a glance toward the Broadway Centipede.

Diamond Dan retreated a step and threw a hand to the butt of a revolver.

"Not a step further!" he said between his teeth. "I didn't come here for blood, but, by Jupiter! I'm not averse to shedding some. Hands off, Injun Nick. I've dropped your betters for less cause than this. Do you want this affair to go on, Richard?"

"Not in this shape, Diamond," said Richard Redhilt, and his tones seemed to startle the sport.

"Not in this shape, eh? How, then?"

"You have come to forbidden territory," the Centipede went on. "I would have told you this before now if Injun Nick, whom I thought was at Gold Eye, had not come. This is Camp Bonanza."

"I know that, and you are boss here."

"I'm absolute monarch," said Richard Redhilt, proudly. "Yes, to you and to others, this is forbidden ground. I knew you were hunting me before I saw you in my door."

"The Indian told you."

"Injun Nick sent no report," said Richard calmly. "Your presence was given away by a silent agent."

As the Centipede finished, he thrust a hand into a pocket and drew forth the gold button in two pieces.

"You lost one of your famous buttons, Diamond," he continued. "You lost the one that contained the map of Camp Bonanza—the map you drew or had drawn by some spy or detective."

All color seemed to desert the girl-hunter's face. Unable to keep composed, he started back and stared at the objects in Richard Redhilt's hand.

"I need not tell you what induced you to leave New York. Diamond Dan, the play which opened so auspiciously for you is about played through, and you have lost. We were pards once—that is, I was your tool, but now I am master, and on my own ground!"

"You repudiate the pardship that once existed between us?"

"I throw it away!" exclaimed the Broadway Centipede. "You came to Camp Bonanza to see me—to see me alone, if possible, but you shall see the whole gang. They know that you were near. I told them since sundown that the wearer of the gold button was here for a certain purpose. Injun Nick will keep an eye on you. I will not be gone long."

Diamond Dan had no time for reply between the end of the last sentence and Richard Redhilt's departure.

He was alone with the red pard again, and the dark, merciless eyes seemed to look him through.

A thousand thoughts and plans chase done another through his brain. He saw that he had walked into a trap, and he would have given much to have a chance for his life.

The unexpected coming of the Indian had spoiled everything. He wished the red right bower in the lake of brimstone.

The moments glided away with silence in the cabin. The two men—red and white—stood face to face, watching and watched.

"I can't bribe this red Cerberus," said Diamond Dan to himself. "He is devoted to Richard Redhilt, and will serve him in any way. I must remain here till the boss sport comes back. I will bet my head that I am not far from Bertha; she is in this camp."

At the end of ten minutes the door opened again, and Diamond Dan saw Richard and a lot of men.

"The galoots of the mountain den," he said to himself. "These men are ready to shoot me dead in my boots if the Centipede gives the command. The map in the button condemns me. It tells him that I am here to win the gold game. I wonder who found that button?"

Richard Redhilt's stalwart and handsome figure was in the cabin door.

"This is the man I told you about," he said, glancing at the crowd at his back as he pointed toward Diamond Dan. "You will see that Injun Nick is here, and he came in the nick of time as he often does. That man is the owner of the gold button. He is prepared to tell you that we were pards once. I admit that now. He is here for a purpose which no living man shall carry out. You remember the oath taken

when we founded Camp Bonanza? We made it forbidden ground for all adventurers, gold-hunters and spies. The young man who came in the spring felt the power of that midnight-taken oath. What shall be the fate of this man?"

A nameless thrill went to Diamond Dan's heart as he looked at Richard Redhilt and heard these words drop from his tongue.

Could this man be the same person who had sworn eternal fealty to him in New York? Was this really the Broadway Centipede whom he had shielded from the police and detectives at the risk of his own life?

The red scar on the cheek answered these interrogatives in the affirmative.

Yes, this man was Robert Roy, the Broadway Centipede and the Bowery thug.

"You don't have to be backward," continued Richard, to the crowd. "What shall be the fate of this trespasser?"

More than a dozen men spoke at once.

"Death!" they all said.

"You hear that?" said Richard, looking glaringly at Diamond Dan. "You had better have stayed in Gotham."

Perhaps he saw this now, but New York was thousands of miles away, and Camp Bonanza was not the populous city between the great rivers.

"It isn't more than I expect since seeing your gang of pards," said Diamond, looking straight into Richard Redhilt's eyes.

"That's a compliment, boys," laughed the Centipede. "I want to be left a moment with this man who is to die within the next thirty minutes."

The pards of Camp Bonanza drew back and Injun Nick with a glance at Richard withdrew.

"Cover him through the window, but shut the door," continued the Broadway Centipede. "If he makes a move riddle him with bullets."

The first command was obeyed, the cabin door was shut and a dozen revolver muzzles touched the glass of the little window alongside.

"Diamond," said Richard Redhilt, after eying his prisoner for a moment, and in a lowered voice. "There is yet one chance, though the band has voted for death. You are hunting the girl."

Diamond Dan knew that longer concealment was impossible.

"I am trying to carry out the solemn agreement made in New York," he said. "I was to have the heir."

The Centipede said nothing for a moment.

"Circumstances have rendered the agreement void," he said when he spoke again. "You can't have the girl."

"She is here, then?" exclaimed the New Yorker eagerly.

"I have not said so, but I repeat that you cannot have her. Let me go back to my first words, Diamond. There is yet one chance for you."

Diamond Dan glued his lips resolutely together and drew his magnificent figure proudly up.

"I was once too proud to ask mercy at your hands, Thug, and by heavens! I am still!" he said to himself.

"The chance is this," Richard went on. "If you will tell me where you got the map of this camp and swear that you will leave it forever, I will rob the Banded Brothers of Camp Bonanza of a victim. Your oath is good, Diamond Dan. I can't forget that together we used to applaud the Herculean feats of the red star of the Madison Square Circus."

"Don't bring your Indian strangler up," said Diamond madly.

"Ah! you don't like him, I see," laughed Richard. "He is worth his weight in gold to a man like me. He has been waiting for our old enemy Captain Coldgrip, and I'm actually eager for the two to meet. But the map! You did not draft that yourself Diamond?"

The eyes of the latest arrival from New York got a flash of defiance, that made Richard Redhilt bite his lip.

There was no answer.

"You won't take the chance, then?" asked the Centipede.

"I'll take what comes," blurted Diamond Dan.

"That is death!"

Richard threw a quick look toward the little window. Whether it was a signal or not the door opened and the ready figure and gleaming eyes of Injun Nick were on hand.

"Take the prisoner," said Richard to the Indian and the crowd behind him and at the same time he stepped back.

Diamond Dan saw himself covered by half a dozen revolvers. He expected to see the crowd advance steadily across the threshold.

"Now or never!" he said to himself.

All at once Injun Nick bounded forward, and before the girl-tracker could form a single plan of defense he was seized by the red hands and was being carried by main strength toward the six shooters at the door.

It was all the work of a moment.

"That red-skin is a daisy!" ejaculated Richard Redhilt.

Diamond Dan fell among the crowd before he could collect his senses. Half a dozen hands seemed to clutch him at once, and the following minute he was walking away, covered by revolvers, upon whose gleaming barrels the silver moonlight fell.

He had but to look over his shoulder to see the expressionless and cold face of the red pard. "Stranger, this is Camp Bonanza, an' forbidden ground ter everybody but its pards," said one of the big men by whom he was held. "We ar' goin' to show yer whar we prove what I've said."

Diamond Dan did not doubt it, but he made no reply, though he bitterly cursed his fate.

"A man in my fix will do anything," he said to himself. "These men intend to kill me in some manner. There is not the slightest doubt of this. Richard Redhilt, or the Broadway Centipede, knows why I am here. My death may give him the game. I'm going to make a break for freedom. The chances are against me. There isn't one out of a hundred in my favor. If I am to go down the stairs of perdition to-night, it sha'n't be alone. Diamond Dan of New York can die like a devil in Colorado!"

His hands shut with madness over the last sentence, and then jerking back suddenly, he broke loose with a giant's strength, whipped out a revolver, and fired point-blank into Injun Nick's face!

CHAPTER XV.

CAPTAIN COLDGRIP'S NEW PLAY.

THE shot and the wild exclamations of rage that followed it were heard by a certain person who at the time was about to enter Camp Bonanza from the West.

This individual was a man squarely built, good-looking and well dressed, but in the somewhat faded garments of the New Mexican rancher.

He stopped short at the shot, and seemed to wonder what it meant.

The next moment a man hove in sight—a tall man running for his life—while half a dozen revolvers were flashing behind him. The stranger drew back, and the runner and the bullets sped by.

"That man is Diamond Dan!" he ejaculated as the moonlight showed him the runner for a moment. "Richard might think it a startling coincidence if I should turn up now, but I am here all the same, and ready to play my pet game out."

Five minutes later the speaker was in the camp.

The man who had escaped by the skin of his teeth was gone, but he had left behind the maddest band of roughs ever seen among the mountains.

We need not tell the reader that the man in faded rancher costume was Captain Coldgrip, and it can be said here, in a word almost, that by following Diamond Dan he had found the place sought after with the pertinacity of the bloodhound.

The New York Vidocq was ready for another tussle with Richard Redhilt, and this time no accident by raid should defeat his purpose.

Luke the Mormon, robbed of the map which had cost his detective his life, was in Salt Lake City, and Diamond Dan had failed in his first play at Camp Bonanza.

It was time for Captain Coldgrip to appear on the scene; his bloodless hand had clutched no throat since it choked Diamond senseless in the saddle between Gold Eye and Alabaster.

A silken black beard covered the detective's face, and completely altered his looks. He appeared what he claimed to be, a rancher with no great amount of money, but one with several bonanzas in prospect.

Confident of his disguise, he entered the gold camp and walked straight to the swearing crowd in front of a certain cabin.

Discovery could not be delayed; he was seen by half a dozen men at once, and advancing still nearer he doffed his crushed sombrero and said something in a mixture of Spanish and English that instantly confirmed his role in the minds of half of the crowd.

"Thar's a new man out hyer, cap'n," said one of the roughs to Richard Redhilt who was dressing the wound of an Indian who occupied a three legged stool and leaned against the table in the cabin.

"A new man?" echoed the Broadway Centipede and his hands paused without effort.

"A Greaser rancher," was the reply. "He just now says thet his hoss died for 'im in ther mountains, an' that he accidentally struck Camp Bonanza."

A suspicious gleam lit up Richard Redhilt's eyes, and that moment he met Injun Nick's gaze.

The lips of the red-skin moved but no word was spoken. Whether Richard understood the sign language or not, he quickly finished his surgery almost ended anyhow and turned toward the door.

"Where is this man?" he asked.

The next moment Captain Coldgrip stood face to face with the Broadway Centipede.

There was a quick exchange of scrutinizing looks.

"Something's happened here, I see," said the

New York man-hunter, his eyes now regarding Injun Nick, who, by the barest chance, had missed being killed by Diamond Dan.

"I should say so," grated Richard Redhilt, apparently unsuspecting.

"Ah! I saw a man running for his life—a big man. It would have taken lightning to have overtaken him. *Sacrista!* how the American did run!"

"It will be worse than run if this man ever finds him," said Richard, glancing at Injun Nick, who from pain did not seem to take much interest in the visitor, as with a mad growl he left the stool, and dropped sullenly upon a cot near by. "I am told that you have lost your horse?"

"Yes; he died in the mountains, and I have to take it afoot, as you see. It is my misfortune, and a great one, for I am not used to walking. Senor, I am Mango Morello, once a prosperous rancher of Tinaja, but now not as rich in land as formerly. But, by the souls of our lady saints!" and he glanced toward the crowd at the door, as he slightly lowered his voice, "I will one day be rich enough to buy my enemies out."

There was nothing about the speaker to indicate his true character.

His glossy beard, his sallow complexion, and the almost perfect Mexican accent, which he employed when speaking, were quite enough to deceive even the watchful Centipede.

"You are welcome here, though we don't keep open house," said Richard Redhilt. "As for a new horse, I think you can be accommodated, but not just now, perhaps. We've had a scene to-night."

"The flying man told me that," answered the disguised detective with a smile. "A horse-thief, probably, senor."

"Worse than that," said the Broadway Centipede between his teeth. "Gentlemen, remember that I offer five hundred for Diamond Dan, dead or alive," he continued, addressing the men before the cabin. "Injun Nick is not badly hurt, but it was a close shave. I blame nobody. The rascal saw he had to make a bold break, and he made it. Fortune helped him off, but fate may throw him back into our hands. Remember! five hundred, and dead or alive. I have no choice now."

The crowd drew back with assurances that Diamond Dan's freedom should be curtailed in the near future, and Richard pushed the door to.

A glance toward the cot showed that the Indian had turned toward the wall, and was apparently asleep.

Richard Redhilt looked at his visitor who was still standing and then invited him to one of the stools.

"From Tinaja, eh?" he said. "Let me see, where is it?"

"A few miles west of the Rio Grande in southwestern New Mexico. I used to be a man there."

"Enemies you said awhile ago."

"Enemies! snakes!" cried the detective.

"Senor, have you no enemies?"

"Plenty of them!" laughed the Broadway Centipede. "I wouldn't give a dollar for a man who had none."

Captain Coldgrip laughed.

"They are plentiful about Tinaja," he said.

"They didn't like Mango Morello because he won at monte all the time. They got up a conspiracy, the devils did; they made me show my knife and one man—the big Senor Cestardo—went to his fathers."

"Ha! I see—forced to leave!" smiled Richard Redhilt.

The detective bowed.

"I know how that is," the Centipede went on glancing at the quiet Indian on the cot. "I've been thar, senor."

"In New Mexico?" asked Coldgrip naturally.

"No—in the States."

"Then, your hand, senor. We should be friends since we are exiles. *Peste!* if we had some Tinaja liquor we would drink to our enemies' death."

Richard Redhilt took the hand extended; it was incased in a glove which the detective had not taken off since entering the camp—a glove with gold threads in the seams, showing at once the rancher's pride and station.

"I've got whisky here," said the Centipede, rising. "It may not be as good as the kind you are used to but it is a throat-cleaner all the same."

He stepped to one corner of the cabin and drew aside a curtain. The following moment the clink of glasses was heard and he placed a black-necked bottle and two small goblets upon the table.

"Your friend, the Indian—"

"Nick has gone to sleep," said Richard. "The scoundrel who got away nearly finished him. You heard me offer five hundred for him dead or alive, captain?"

"Si, senor."

"I'll give every cent of it!" said Richard with emphasis. "That man who is an old enemy of mine, came here to play a game of his own planning, but he found the deck stacked against him. And let me say that it is stacked beforehand against every enemy I've got."

Richard was pouring out the liquor while he spoke, and he did not see the singular twinkle that lit up the eyes of the man who was watching him like a lynx.

"Did your enemies force you to shed blood, senor?" asked Captain Coldgrip.

The Centipede started, and the neck of the black bottle dropped hard upon the rim of the glass. He looked up quickly and caught the speaker's eye.

"They made me, you know, senor," continued the detective, smiling.

"I'm in the same boat, captain," exclaimed Richard. "The man who was here to-night, and another wretch who is a Mormon king to-day, got me into a scrape once. That made me hustle. But it wouldn't interest you, and I don't like to talk about it. Oh! here is your glass filled with Colorado poison. Shall we go off together?"

"With pleasure, senor," said Captain Coldgrip. "May all our enemies find a stout rope and an easy noose. Ha, ha! here we go!"

As the two men threw back their heads to drain their glasses there was a noiseless movement on the cot against the wall.

The face of Injun Nick was turned to the table, and his deep black eyes became riveted on the so-called rancher from Tinaja.

For half a second those eyes glittered like a basilisk's, but as Captain Coldgrip set his glass down, they went back to the darkened wall again, and there was nothing to show that Injun Nick had stirred.

What had he discovered in that second's scrutiny?

"Senor," said Richard, "you needn't give Camp Bonanza a sudden shake."

"Thanks," was the reply. "I have gold enough to buy a new horse. The blood-and-monte wolves did not drive Mango Morello broke from Tinaja. I have here," laying his hand on his bosom, "the secret of a bonanza whose wealth can break every monte bank in New Mexico."

Did Richard Redhilt's eyes glisten at this announcement? At any rate, he pushed the black bottle toward Captain Coldgrip, and then filled his own glass.

During the second toast Injun Nick executed the same movement he had made before. It was noiseless and unseen, and the face that he turned toward the wall was a puzzle.

"Wait for me here," suddenly said Richard, holding the bottle before the lamp, and showing that it was empty. "I'll make a draw on the wine cellar for something better than this," and the next moment Captain Coldgrip found himself alone with the red right bower.

He looked at the figure of the Indian motionless on the cot, and his mind went back to the night he had overtaken him on the trail between Alabaster and Gold Eye.

He had learned before that Injun Nick was still alive, and yet he had pushed him over a thousand-foot precipice. He was now in a cabin with the terrible red, and his hands itched to clutch that scarlet throat again.

"This is the most dangerous man I have to meet in this game," said Captain Coldgrip to himself while he eyed the Indian. "I did not expect to find him here, but he always turns up when he isn't wanted. I wonder if you are asleep, my red tiger-cat? By Jupiter! I can hardly keep my hands off, and yet I must make no fool play to-night. I would have given my scalp if Diamond Dan had finished you. Richard Redhilt does not suspect. If you have been hoodwinked, Injun Nick, I am safe."

He leaned forward and looked at the Indian, who seemed to be in a deep sleep. The silence in the little cabin was broken by no sound, and the lamp threw the shadow of the cool detective on the gray logs behind him.

At last a sound was heard and Captain Coldgrip looked toward the door.

The Centipede had come back, and in his arms were several bottles which he placed on the table with a laugh.

"The whole camp is hunting the runaway," he said. "I may have a chance to pay my reward before morning."

The cabin door stood open and the warm night air came in.

Suddenly it brought to the ears of all in the shanty the clear reports of two fire-arms, discharged close together.

Richard, the Centipede, sprang to the door, but the sounds had died away and there was no repetition.

Five minutes later a man reached the cabin.

"We got him, captain!" he said.

Richard uttered an exclamation of joy.

"Where is he?"

"Hyer!"

The man drew back and waved his hand toward a person who was carried by four men.

Richard Redhilt caught up the lamp and rushed out. One look was enough.

"This man is the Mormon Spider!" he cried.

CHAPTER XVI.

SPIDER AND CENTIPEDE.

THE words went through Captain Coldgrip like an arrow.

Luke the Mormon in Camp Bonanza?

He could not believe it. When he passed from the shanty, he saw Richard Redhilt, lamp in hand, staring at the man he had recognized and whose name he had just uttered.

"This is the wrong man in one sense of the word," said Richard, suddenly, raising his eyes to the startled men who now saw that their prisoner was not Diamond Dan.

"We got him all the same, captain," was the answer. "When we let 'im hev ther contents ov our droppers, we'd hev bet our sweet lives he war ther man on whose head war yer five hundred."

"Is he dead?"

The Broadway Centipede bent over the Mormon sport and looked closely.

"Not dead, but gettin' thar," said some one.

All this time Captain Coldgrip was looking at the man who had been brought in apparently nearly dead.

He knew him as Luke the Mormon and he wondered what would be Richard Redhilt's next move.

It was apparent that Luke Logan's presence in camp was a thunderbolt to the Centipede. Diamond Dan had just made his escape from the revolvers of the gold toughs, and now here was the other pard—the Mormon Croesus.

Strange and startling thoughts were chasing each other through Richard's mind.

Who would come next?—Captain Coldgrip?

I do not know that he would have started if the Gotham Vidocq had touched him at that moment and unmasked himself.

Richard was almost prepared for anything.

Injun Nick had not heard of the new arrival, or, if he had, he was not making any fuss about it.

"This is the other one," Redhilt said, turning suddenly upon the so-called Morello.

"Ah! there are two, senior?" said the detective, composed.

"Two," echoed Richard between his teeth.

"I did not know this one was about, but the boys got him all the same. He isn't dead, but he won't find Camp Bonanza a healing hospital. Carry him inside."

The last sentence was addressed to the men who bore Luke the Mormon across the threshold and deposited him on a spot designated by the Centipede.

Captain Coldgrip went to the door and looked in. The scene possessed unspeakable interest for him.

"If you don't want to remain here, senior, Cyclone will show you to Little Lot's shanty," Richard said, suddenly catching his eye. "Lot's gone away on a wild goose chase, and doesn't need his nest. To-morrow I'll see you again. You've struck camp in the midst of an unexpected game."

These words told the detective that he was not wanted at Richard's cabin, and the next moment he had thanked the sport for the offer of Little Lot's cabin, and was walking away accompanied by a tall tough known as Cyclone Clint.

No sooner had the captain departed than Injun Nick turned and fixed his eyes on the man lying near him on the floor with a folded coat for a pillow.

The orbs of the Indian seemed to flash, and in a moment he had met Richard's gaze.

"It is Luke," said the Centipede, going over to Injun Nick.

"Tell me in Heaven's name, what will happen next?"

"Does he know?" asked the red right bower.

"He is unconscious," said Richard. "I don't know about reviving him."

Indian Nick crawled from his cot, and raising himself on his hands leaned over the Mormon Spider.

"It is Luke," he said, glancing up at Richard.

"I wonder how he found the trail?"

"I am puzzled. Are Luke and Diamond Dan working together? They both appear at once. I thought Camp Bonanza could not be found, Nick, but what do you say now?"

Injun Nick shook his head in a puzzled manner.

"When anything puzzles you it is very mysterious," said Richard. "But the question is: Is it best to bring this man back to consciousness?"

The red right-bower was silent for a moment, then his hand stole into Luke's bosom and he said:

"Yes, bring him back."

Before Injun Nick he had made sure that he and Richard were the only companions of the floor. He had noticed, too, that there were no eyes at the window and the door had been shut.

Richard Redhilt went to work with some of the liquor he had lately brought to the cabin. He forced a few drops of it between the Mormon's lips and awaited results.

In a little while the effect came, expression came back into the Spider's eyes, and they became slowly fixed on the Centipede.

It was amusing to see the look that gradually formed in the Mormon's orbs. It was met by a smile of triumph at Richard Redhilt's mouth.

"Well, you got here, Luke," said the Broadway Centipede. "You had to track me down like a bloodhound."

"It is you, Richard," said the Mormon, feebly. "Do you keep men on the mountain to shoot on sight?"

"I don't keep them there, but I sent them," was the reply. "You weren't contented in Salt Lake; you had everything thar man ought to wish for—gold, beauty and ease. But you had to take up the game I warned you against the night you met me in the car that was wrecked between Eagle's Nest and Rocky Gulch. This is Injun Nick, my red right bower. I think you've seen him before."

"I know him," said Luke, as his eyes met the Indian's. "Have you looked at my wound, Richard?"

"Not yet, but I will."

And the Centipede stooped over the Mormon sport.

"Send your Injun out," whispered Luke.

Richard looked up into Injun Nick's eyes, and that worthy walked slowly from the cabin, proving that his wound in the head had not greatly weakened him.

"How is it going, Dick?" asked the Mormon, eagerly, when the door had shut behind the figure of the merciless savage.

"What?"

"The game."

"What game?"

Luke the Mormon bit his lip over Richard's apparent inability to understand.

"I've got to be plain, I see," he said. "How's the New York beauty by this time?"

The Centipede started.

"What do I know about the girl?" he asked. "I've got enough to keep myself from the dogs of the law."

Luke gave Richard a close look.

Was this man speaking the truth?

He could not believe it, for had he not come to Camp Bonanza convinced that Bertha was there?

He had discovered a clew to the murder of his detective, Onyx Oil. He had forced his Cuban wife with the terrible crime, and his hands had choked from her the confession.

He could not be mistaken. Ninez had told him that she had surrendered the original map to Diamond Dan, and he had made her confess that she had a copy which he forced from her possession.

Therefore, Luke the Mormon had a right to doubt Richard Redhilt's words, and he did so.

"I don't want her, Dick," he said. "I've got three wives already."

"Why didn't you stay with them?" was the quick retort. "The man who was here before you wasn't looking for her, either. Oh, no!"

"Who was here?"

"Diamond Dan. He came here, hunted me down without a thought of the prize I am supposed to hold. He said so, and you know, Luke, he wouldn't lie!" and Richard laughed derisively.

The Mormon Spider said nothing for a moment. He seemed to be weighing the chances of life and death.

"Look at my wound," he said, at last.

"Where is it?"

"In the right breast."

Richard opened the Mormon's clothes and went to work with very little tenderness. The wound was not hard to find, and when he had found it he held the lamp close for an examination.

Luke, the Mormon, saw his eyes twinkle.

"That means that I've got to cash my chips," he said to himself, but he waited coolly for the verdict.

"Thar's no chance, Luke," Richard Redhilt said. "You've got to go."

"I don't think you'd help my chances if I had any," answered the Mormon, bitterly.

"By the eternal heavens! I wouldn't!" hissed the Centipede. "If the bullet should fail, I will see that the rope doesn't! There is but one thing that would bring you from your Mormon gold and your Mormon women to Camp Bonanza. It brought Diamond Dan from New York, and it kept the youth, Silver Silas, on my trail till I showed him a hand that was never beaten. I have discarded the black mask, you see, and the scar that made me a marked man in the East is now seen by all men. You know why I am here. You believe that Bertha is here. You would be a fool if you believed otherwise, Luke. You got the benefit of the securities we got for our trouble in Gotham. They say they laid the foundation of the fortune you enjoy. And three wives—regular stunners, too! Great Caesar! man, do you want the earth?"

"No," said Mormon Luke, giving Richard look for look. "But I tell you what I will do. I'll give you three for one."

For a moment the Centipede looked incredulous, and then he burst into a loud laugh.

"Three for one, and a dying man makes the proposition!" he exclaimed.

"Dying?" echoed Luke.

"You'll be dead in twenty minutes!"

Mormon Luke tried to fathom the look in Richard Redhilt's eyes. Were his words a boast, or did he mean all he said?

"You don't believe me," continued Richard

suddenly. "You think, perhaps, that the New York oath holds in Colorado. It breaks like a rope of sand in Camp Bonanza. Luke Logan, if you ever pray—if you have any peace to make along the trail—make it now."

The speaker threw a hasty glance toward the window and saw a pair of gleaming eyes there.

They disappeared in a moment and then the door opened. Injun Nick was back.

"The red thug has come at the beck of his master," said Luke the Mormon to himself. "Between these two devils I am to be murdered without mercy. The game is against me. Three wives are enough!"

Injun Nick, cool as Malay assassin, stood erect awaiting orders. He seemed to know why he had been summoned back into the room.

"Are you ready, Luke?" suddenly asked Richard Redhilt.

"Ready for what?"

"Death!"

Injun Nick took a step forward. His big red hands were empty, but they looked eager to have work.

"The Mormon dog will die speechless," said the Centipede to his red right bower. "Do your duty, Injun Nick."

In another second the red-skin would have fallen upon Luke the Mormon like a lightning bolt, but all at once a stern voice said "Halt!" and the Indian stood still.

The one word came from the door, and Richard Redhilt and his scarlet pard looked into the leveled revolvers of the man from Tinaja.

"I believe in giving a man a chance, gentlemen," he said provokingly.

CHAPTER XVII.

MORMON LUKE'S NERVE.

INJUN NICK stepped back and showed his teeth, and Richard Redhilt showed that he had been struck with astonishment.

The two revolvers did not tremble in the hands that held them, and the eyes of the man from Tinaja showed that he was perfectly cool and collected.

It was a tableau for which the two pards were not prepared.

"Do you mean that you are this man's friend?" asked the Centipede the first of the pards to speak.

"No. I want fair play—that is all."

"Fair play, eh?"

Richard seemed to crush the words between his jaws.

"Fair play," repeated Mango Morello. "Do you always kill wounded men in Camp Bonanza?"

Injun Nick's figure was seen to lean slightly toward the Broadway Centipede.

"Let the Mormon go, captain," he whispered.

"The Tinaja dog holds the best hand now."

The truth of the last remark was self-evident.

"In fortune's name, who is that man?" Luke the Mormon had asked himself, since seeing the man who had come between so suddenly. "I don't know that I have ever seen him before, but there seems to be a familiar gleam in his eyes. When did he come to camp, and for what?"

The question was unanswered.

"Take your man!" suddenly snapped Richard Redhilt. "Death has a grip on him, anyhow, and the cashing of his chips is only a question of time. As for you—"

"Well, what about me, captain?" asked Captain Coldgrip, with a cool smile.

"You'd better go back to Tinaja or elsewhere."

"Awhile ago you pressed me to remain," was the reply.

"Bonanza can get along without your company."

The man with the revolvers threw a glance at Luke the Mormon.

"Can you get up?" he asked.

The man on the floor made an effort to rise, and succeeded at the second trial.

He came toward the door with eyes agleam with thankfulness.

"I'll never forget this," he said, in a low voice to the Gotham Vidocq, and the next moment he stood in the moonlight waiting for his deliverer.

"I am not going back to Tinaja, gentlemen," said Captain Coldgrip to the pards in the cabin. "I shall probably be found in Camp Bonanza for an indefinite time. Good-night."

Was this to be all?

Was the cool head who was leading Luke the Mormon away, to be permitted to enjoy his exasperating victory?

Richard Redhilt and Injun Nick stood face to face like persons spellbound, for several moments after the departure.

"Who is that man?" asked the Centipede. "He came here as a broken rancher from Tinaja. Is he that man?"

The Indian sprung toward his master and his hand dropped upon his arm.

"He could fool you, but not me, captain," he said. "I'll bet my head that he never saw Tinaja. The man who has just left here with Luke, is your old hunter, Captain Coldgrip!"

Richard Redhilt recoiled with a startled cry.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed.

"Injun Nick can prove it. His hands itch to clutch the throat of the New York ferret. He hasn't given up the game he started to play two years ago; he has only been thrown off the scent—nothing more."

"He ends it forever in Camp Bonanza," was the reply. "I will let him see the teeth of the wolves I keep here."

Injun Nick drew back a step and looked at his master.

"You will do this?" he said. "You will rush matters and have more dead men than we can bury in one day. You will tell the parads that Captain Coldgrip is in camp, and place Little Lot's cabin in a state of siege. When did you lose your head, captain?"

Richard Redhilt showed his chagrin.

"What do you propose?" he asked. "Three men whom we did not want to see have come, and all at once, too. Is it merely a coincidence?"

"No, it is fate," was the answer. "We have been discovered by some spy, and the information has fallen into the hands of those men. Diamond Dan found me in Gold Eye, and I gave him ten minutes to leave. He went away. I don't know how Luke the Mormon found us, but by one of his detectives perhaps. The game has been transferred to Camp Bonanza, and it must be played out here. Is the prize still safe?"

"Safe," said Richard Redhilt quickly.

"She knows nothing of this?"

"Nothing."

"When did you see her?"

"Yesterday."

The Indian seemed satisfied.

He went to the door and looked out. Nobody was in sight, and the streets of the secret camp seemed entirely deserted.

"Wait for me, captain," he said, over his shoulders, and before Richard could speak or join him he was gone.

"Captain Coldgrip, the last man expected or wanted here!" grated the Broadway Centipede, when he found himself alone. "I would have given all my dust if I had seen him in the man from Tinaja. Injun Nick has the eyes of a lynx. Nothing baffles him. But you've come to the wrong place for a good play, captain. The stake of the old game isn't far off, but your hands will never touch it. It has been won and by Richard Redhilt. I am to wait for Injun Nick. I am not permitted to rouse the boys. Nick never failed but once, and that was when the bloodless hand of this cool devil was at his throat."

Injun Nick was already a good piece from the cabin.

He passed the shanty to which he supposed Captain Coldgrip had conducted the desperately wounded Mormon Spider. His eyes glared at it as if it was a place soon to be attacked and doubtless it was.

Meanwhile, the New York detective had taken Luke the Mormon to the suburbs of the camp.

The Utah Croesus had not spoken since his rescue, and he did not speak until he saw that the camp was behind him.

"I'm afraid I've fallen from the pan into the fire," he said, looking up with a sickly smile into Captain Coldgrip's face.

"I hope not," was the answer. "Where is your horse?"

"A mile from camp; but heavens! I can't go back to Salt Lake in the condition I am in. I am shot to the death."

"I know that. I thought once, Luke Logan, that I would some day turn you over to the authorities of New York City, but I will never have that pleasure. The man back there—the Broadway Centipede—I will outwit for vengeance!"

"You'll never do it, Captain Coldgrip," said Luke with confidence. "While I hate Richard Redhilt who was once my pard, I am certain you will never foil him here."

A proud smile curled the detective's lip; he threw a look over his shoulder, but returned quickly to the man at his side.

"If you can't go back to your horses, you can die trying it," said he to Luke. "Die with your face toward Utah, anyhow, Luke Logan."

The Mormon sport set his teeth hard.

"I will!" he cried. "Maybe I was a fool to come here, but Jehu! captain, what a face that girl had when I saw her last."

"She is prettier than ever now," the detective said.

"She must be. She is a woman now; then she was little more than a girl. Shoot me into Tartarus! if I wouldn't give all my women for her and I've got three queens up in Salt Lake. Yes, I'll die with my face toward Utah. Let me reach the horse that brought me from Gunnison, and I will show Richard and his Injun that there's years of life for me yet!"

Captain Coldgrip looked at the Mormon sport and smiled.

A little later two men, one leaning on the other, went down the mountain trail, and were soon lost among the shadows of the lofty hills and the large trees.

There was something desperately heroic in the man who was so eager to reach a horse which he had left among the mountain brushwood, and that with a death wound in his breast.

His eyes snapped furiously as he went along, and the watchful detective saw him open and shut his hands as his thoughts fluctuated.

"At the end of my string?" he said time and again to himself. "Am I at the close of the game, and is the stakes in the hands of my opponents? Not yet! I am still Luke Logan, the man who has won games just as desperate as this."

By and by the two men reached a horse in the dense brush.

Luke the Mormon uttered a cry of joy.

"In the first place, captain, fix me up," said he to his companion. "Richard looked at my hurt back in the cabin, and his eyes fairly danced for joy. He would have bet a cool hundred that death was about to throw down the last ace. Fix me up for Salt Lake, and for New York courts, if you're anxious to save me."

The Mormon sport lay down in the beautiful moonlight, and Captain Coldgrip went to work at his wound, which had not bled much since the shot.

He did the best he could with the means at his command. It was a difficult operation, and the light was not good enough to promise a very successful one.

Luke the Mormon had to be content with what he got at Captain Coldgrip's hands.

"Now for Utah!" he said, when he had been helped to the saddle. "There's life in the New Yorker yet, captain. You don't expect me to ride far, I see?"

"You'll never see the harem again, Luke," said the detective.

"What'll you bet?"

The old gambler spoke in the question, and his eyes gleamed anew.

"Good-by," he said, giving Captain Coldgrip his hand. "When you want me, you'll find me in the City of the Saints."

The hands of the two men fell apart as the last word was spoken, and the horse started forward.

Captain Coldgrip stood on the trail and watched Luke till he vanished.

"He won't get five miles on his way," he murmured. "He may have a constitution of iron, but a wound like his will destroy it. Good-by, Luke; neither New York justice nor the beauties of the Mormon harem will see you again."

He turned toward Camp Bonanza, and ceased to look after the man who was riding away.

He did not see the man who had sprung suddenly before Luke's horse, nor hear the Mormon sport's ejaculation of surprise.

"Great Caesar! Diamond Dan!" cried Luke, recognizing the man at the bridle-rein. "They tell me that you got away by the skin of your teeth to-night."

"I killed the Injun and gave 'em the slip," laughed the New York sport. "Whar ar' you going?"

"Back to Utah."

"You haven't been here twenty-four hours."

"I've been here long enough to get a two-finger hole in my breast, and all on your account, Diamond. You haven't killed Injun Nick; but he is waiting for you in Camp Bonanza. You forced one map from Ninez, but an accursed duplicate brought me here. Do you expect to find Bertha?"

"Yes."

"Fool!" laughed Luke the Mormon, leaning toward Diamond Dan. "I would give my wealth for her, but I'm going to be satisfied with my harem. But if you should win, Diamond, let me warn you not to bring the prize to Salt Lake City."

"I know! I've seen the tigress there," smiled the New York sport. "You can bet your life, Luke, that I haven't come from Gotham to fail in Colorado."

The hand of the speaker fell from the rein and he stepped back.

"Good luck to you, Luke," said Diamond Dan.

"I won't wish you that!" hissed the Mormon sport, and the two men parted forever.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GULCH CAGE.

"I WONDER if they're waiting for me?" murmured Captain Coldgrip, as he turned back toward Camp Bonanza having left Mormon Luke in the saddle and headed for Salt Lake. "There seemed to be a gleam of recognition in the Indian eye when I saw it last. Maybe I missed it in not throttling the red fox while he slept in Richard's shanty. But we will soon see."

He did not know, of course, that Diamond Dan had met the Mormon sport; had he known this he might have waited for the New York sport to come up.

The camp seemed quiet enough when he entered; here and there was a light, but no living person was visible.

Captain Coldgrip looked disappointed. He had expected to meet some one before this for he did not believe that his rescue of Mormon Luke would be permitted to go unpunished.

If he had not taken Luke from camp and set him on the trail to Utah he might have followed Injun Nick who, as we know, left Richard's cabin shortly after the startling rescue.

Let us follow the Indian.

He left the camp on the north side and plunged into the moonlit mountains.

Myriads of weird shadows fell about him and soon swallowed the Indian up.

Immobile of countenance as ever, but with an eager light in his eye, Injun Nick kept on confident that no one was on his trail for sharp backward glances kept him prepared against surprise.

At last he found himself in a deep and narrow gulch whose top in some places was almost bridged by the leaning trees that grew on the brink of its walls.

Injun Nick had been there before as his movements showed.

Half-way down the gulch—it cannot be called a canyon, he stopped and listened.

Not a sound reached his ears.

If a wolf had followed him, he would have heard it now.

Stepping suddenly to the wall on his right, Richard Redhilt's right-bower took hold of a large flat stone that leaned against the rocks, and pulled it aside.

This operation revealed what appeared to be the mouth of a cavern large enough to admit a stooping man.

Injun Nick went in adroitly, and found himself in darkness. A narrow corridor, which inclined gradually, was next traversed, and after awhile the Indian reached the brink of a wall.

Before this, Injun Nick had lighted a small torch, which his cunning hands had found in the darkness, and he knew when to stop by its glare.

The red-skin had not come to this place for nothing.

"Richard said the bird was still safe," he said to himself. "With Captain Coldgrip here, nothing is safe. I will not believe Richard till I have seen with my own eyes."

He found a coil of rope, one end of which was attached to a heavy iron staple fixed in the wall. He uncoiled the cord and let it drop along the wall beneath him.

When it hung straight, he transferred his little torch to his left hand, took the rope in his right, and lowered himself over the brink.

It was a strange proceeding.

Injun Nick struck ground forty feet below his starting point, and found himself in a small apartment, whose walls he could almost touch by extending his hands.

The rope was left hanging in its place, and the Indian started off down a narrow corridor, which brought him to another underground room, which he entered with a good deal of caution.

There were evidences about him—plenty of them—that he had reached a human habitation.

The floor of the cavern was covered with a soft matting that sent forth no sound. There were a few articles of furniture scattered about, and in one corner a low cot slightly raised from the ground.

There was no odor of dampness in this subterranean retreat; the air was pure and pleasant. Injun Nick's torch only half illumined the place, but it showed him the cot and the young girl who was sleeping upon it, in her every-day garments, as if she had been touched by slumber when too weary to disrobe.

The Indian's eyes flashed triumphantly at the sight, and the next moment he glided forward, and halted beside the cot.

His torch's light fell upon the beautiful face of the sleeper.

All at once the eyes of the girl opened wide, and became fixed upon the Indian.

She sprang up immediately.

"No, it is not a dream!" she exclaimed. "It is really Injun Nick."

A faint smile appeared suddenly at the corners of the red-skin's mouth; his eyes were seen to glitter.

"You have not been here for a long time," she went on. "You see I am still in the old place. The Broadway Centipede does not come any more. He has not forgotten me, has he, Injun Nick?"

"He never forgets," said the Indian thrusting his torch into a crack in the stone wall above the girl's couch, where it suddenly took new life and blazed up magnificently.

"Ah, neither do I," was the quick reply.

"Your master sent you to me?"

"I came of my own accord," said the Indian.

"Were you afraid that I had left the cage?" laughed the girl. "Look at it, Injun Nick." And she moved her hand above her head. "This cage is sufficient to hold any bird. It was well chosen by the man who placed me here. What is going on outside?"

The abrupt question made the Indian start slightly.

Should he tell Bertha the Beautiful—the stake of the wild game—that Captain Coldgrip, Diamond Dan and Mormon Luke all had been in Camp Bonanza that night? Should he raise her hopes by mentioning the name of the Gotham Vidocq who, after an interval of some months, had found the trail again?

"What do you think has happened my little one?" said Injun Nick.

"You try to puzzle me. How can I know, shut up here as I am?" was the reply. "Richard

Redhilt does not come any more. The man has discarded his black mask. If I had found him with it off the night I came to Gold Eye from Denver, you would not be his servant now. What does he hope to do by keeping me here? You know what he did once, Injun Nick. You know that Richard Redhilt, as he calls himself here, committed a crime which startled all New York. You know he orphaned the person who stands before you, and still you serve him. You may have committed crimes yourself, but your hands are not as red as his—they can never be! Does he hope to make me the wife of the Broadway Centipede?—does he hope by long imprisonment to weaken my spirit? Will you bear a message to this man, Injun Nick?"

The red-skin did not speak, as if the young girl had held him spell-bound.

"Brave as you are, you dare not!" she went on.

"What is it?" asked the Indian quietly.

"Tell him, as your people say, that while grass grows and water runs I will never yield to him; that sooner than touch the hand red with my father's blood I will take my life. Go back to Richard Redhilt with this message from Bertha Bethol. And tell him, too, Injun Nick, that the oath I have taken has not been forgotten, and that I hope to carry it out to the last terrible letter. Heaven has marked that man for me. A few days or a few months may come between, but the end will be the same. What would you do if you saw me about to slay Richard Redhilt—you who know what he is and has been?"

"Don't ask me, girl," said the Indian.

"An oath binds you to the Centipede," she went on. "I don't know but that you have already killed at his bidding. Is the tie between you strong enough to overlook the wrongs of the child of Basil Bethol? Go down into your thoughts, Injun Nick. When I used to see you doing your feats of strength in Madison Square Garden, I never thought we would play a wild drama like this one together. I live for one thing—vengeance. It has become a second nature. You stand between me and the man I have a right to strike. You are that man's pard, his sworn defender, spy, sleuth-hound and, pardon me, Injun Nick—his slave!"

The eyes of the girl seemed to emit sparks of fire. She stood before the Indian like a princess of passion, more beautiful than ever in the light of the torch.

It was easily seen that her last words had stung the red-skin to the quick.

To be called a slave seemed to drive an arrow through his haughty veins.

He recoiled and fixed a pair of eyes full of madness on the girl.

"You don't like it, I see," she laughed, shutting her hands and leaning slightly forward. "You don't like to be called a slave, yet what else are you? You are at the beck and call of this man, whose life-mark was given by a fellow criminal in Sing Sing. You came with him to Colorado—left the scene of your triumphs in the East. When he looks or lifts his hands, you strike. If you are not a murderer's slave, Injun Nick, tell me what you are?"

This was pouring brine into the wounds.

Injun Nick uttered a mad cry and sprang forward.

Bertha shrunk against her couch, and threw up a hand in which glittered the tapering blade of a dagger.

The Indian suddenly stopped.

"Ah! I sent an arrow home, did I?" exclaimed the girl, looking Injun Nick in the eye. "The manner in which you resent my epithet stamps it with truth. You dare not dash your hand against my throat, because it is not your master's command. When he tells you to kill me, you will come here for that purpose, but until then you will not touch Bertha Bethol. You came here to-night to satisfy yourself that I was still a prisoner. Something has happened to send you here. Who has found the trail, Injun Nick?"

"No one," said the Indian, sullenly.

"Look me in the eye and say that," said the girl with a smile. "Is it Captain Coldgrip again?"

Injun Nick shut his lips and said nothing.

"The dog will find the scent," Bertha went on. "I have the greatest confidence in the man who swore in my presence to find the three men who were concerned in the infamous tragedy in the East. He has lost me since then, or rather I could not wait, so, goaded by an oath of my own, I sought the trail of the Broadway Centipede."

"You found it, my child," grinned the Indian.

"I found him, too," was the answer. "I found him in Gold Eye, with the red scar concealed by a black mask, and guarded by Injun Nick, his slave! When Captain Coldgrip finds him again—what?" continued Bertha quickly. "Will you follow him back to the scene of his crime? Will you go with him to New York and say: 'I have served this blood-stained assassin? Hang the slave with his master? Will you do all this, Injun Nick?'"

"The white sleuth-hound will never take Richard Redhilt back!" grated Injun Nick.

"The coil is about to tighten about the trailer, who is the shrewdest dog of his kind!"

"That is a boast," said the girl.

"The mask has been penetrated!" Injun Nick went on. "There are no sharper eyes than those the devil has given the red tracker. The man from Tinaja could not deceive me."

"Then he is here!" exclaimed Bertha, thrilled by her own words. "You do not always speak in riddles, Injun Nick."

"Yes," blurted the Indian. "He is here!"

"Captain Coldgrip?"

"The sleuth-hound of New York!" was the response.

The Indian seemed to increase an inch in stature as the words dropped from his tongue.

Bertha the Beautiful stood spellbound before him.

Captain Coldgrip so near?

"He does not know that I have pierced his disguise," continued Injun Nick. "I have all the advantage, you see. The man with the bloodless hand is completely in our power. He thinks himself secure. Do you think, my child, that he will find you now? When he entered Camp Bonanza as Mango Morello, from Tinaja, it was to die as Captain Coldgrip, the New York Detective. This is your sworn friend, my little girl. This is the man who was to drag Richard Redhilt back to Gotham for trial. Whose hand, think you, is the best now? Ha, ha!"

It was a devil's laugh, and the girl felt her brain in a whirl.

CHAPTER XIX.

STRUNG UP.

BERTHA BETHOL heard only the echoes of the Indian's laugh, when she sunk upon the couch almost in a swoon.

She seemed to realize that the game was all in Richard Redhilt's hands, if Injun Nick, his red right bower, had told the truth. Captain Coldgrip's situation was desperate if his disguise had been penetrated without his knowledge, and the girl at that exciting moment gave him up for lost.

She saw the Indian take the torch from the crack in the wall and go away without power to prevent, and the cavern chamber grew dark again.

If she had followed Injun Nick, she would have seen him ascend the rope she had left hanging along the wall of the first chamber.

There was a flash of vengeance and victory in the Indian's eyes.

"Captain Coldgrip will feel the teeth of the red wolf," he said to himself. "He is no more a man from Tinaja than I am from perdition. Richard's eyes were not sharp enough, but mine were! Ah, they don't fool Injun Nick," and he threaded the narrow stone corridor that led to the gulch at the mouth of the entrance to the subterranean place.

He went back to Camp Bonanza, which was silent and almost entirely dark.

The one light that first attracted his attention drew him toward the cabin that held it, and a moment later he was looking in upon four men playing cards over a rough table.

"I may break up that game before long," muttered Injun Nick as he turned away. "It would be a grand thing to expose him to the whole camp, but then I could not pay him back for the grip he once gave me between Alabaster and Gold Eye."

A faint light was seen beyond the window of Richard Redhilt's cabin.

Injun Nick went forward and opened the door.

The hunted boss of Camp Bonanza was waiting for him.

"Where is he?" cried Richard, before his right bower had closed the door.

"In Little Lot's shanty, I suppose," was the reply.

"You didn't follow him, then?"

"No; I went to see the bird."

Richard started.

"What if he followed you?" he exclaimed, a pallor sweeping over his face.

"But he did not," said the Indian through clinched teeth. "Nobody followed me. I saw the girl and told her last that Captain Coldgrip was in Camp Bonanza with his disguise penetrated, and himself at the doors of doom."

"And she?—what did she say, Nick?"

"It took her breath. I left her bewildered on her couch."

"Didn't she tell you how she loves me?" laughed the Centipede.

"Yes," said Injun Nick. "She hopes to carry out her oath one of these days."

"The same song! She said that, you know, the day I came back to Gold Eye from Captain Coldgrip's clutches. You held her off that time, Nick, or she might have scratched me with the point of her dagger. Time will soften her metal. She will submit when she knows that she has no friends on the trail. Shall we let this fraud from Tinaja have a chance to play a hand to-morrow? Remember, Injun Nick, this man is Captain Coldgrip from New York."

The Indian looked at Richard several moments without speaking; the Centipede grew impatient.

"If he is at Little Lot's cabin he can be taken at a disadvantage," he suggested.

"He is there."

"Why not face him with the whole camp?"

Injun Nick put his hand up at his throat and smiled.

"Ah! you haven't forgotten the grip he gave you," laughed Richard. "You mean that you want to pay him back. I haven't the least objection, only I don't want any failure. We can't afford to fail with this man in camp."

"That is true, but we are not going to fail."

Injun Nick walked to the door, opened it and looked out.

"My head feels full of flying needles sometimes," he said. "If Diamond Dan had taken aim he would have finished me, but he fired in a hurry. However, his bullet made a bad wound, and one that will not heal till I have his life. Mormon Luke must be dead by this time."

"Dead an hour ago," said Richard positively. "I could thrust two fingers into the wound. I am not afraid that Dan will come back. His reception will break up the game he was playing. Our only antagonist is Captain Coldgrip."

"Come then!" said the Indian. "We will have none by to-morrow!"

The Broadway Centipede sprang forward with an exclamation of delight.

"You're worth your weight in diamonds," he exclaimed at Injun Nick's side.

"No praise till the stake is won," was the answer. "We are going to Little Lot's cabin. The man from Tinaja is there. Injun Nick is to play a hand of his own. He feels the blood ess hand again at his throat. His blood is hot, and his head is full of flying needles of pain."

Richard drew back and looked at the Indian. His voice had a strange sound and his eyes danced while they flashed.

"Is the red-skin mad?" the Centipede asked himself. "I don't want him to try conclusions with Captain Coldgrip without a cool head."

He laid his hand on Injun Nick's arm.

"See here," he said. "You want to cool down some. This man is no child. If there is a more dangerous one living, I hope he will never play against me."

The Indian leaned toward the Broadway Centipede and grinned.

"When did Injun Nick plunge hot-headed into anything?" he asked. "He goes to Captain Coldgrip cool and ready. What thinks Richard now?"

The change had come again. Injun Nick's voice had gone back into its natural channels, and his eyes were quiet and almost expressionless once more.

He started forward again without another word, followed by Richard, who had drawn a six-shooter which he carried cocked in his right hand.

The cabin which had been turned over to the man from Tinaja was not far away, and Injun Nick threw a glance of triumph over his shoulder when he stood before it.

If Captain Coldgrip still inhabited it, he had extinguished the light and gone to bed.

Richard Redhilt believed that the cool detective was waiting for them just beyond the door; therefore, he raised his revolver when Injun Nick stepped forward to try conclusions with the old enemy.

The knuckles of the Indian fell against the door three times in succession, and dropped to his side and stretched themselves.

A quick movement inside told the two pards that the cabin was inhabited.

The two men exchanged quick glances in the moonlight.

"If Captain Coldgrip does not know that he is suspected why doesn't he open the door?" thought the Centipede.

Injun Nick's eyes told that he was wrestling with a like problem.

All at once he leaned toward Richard.

"Cover the door and kill the man who comes out if it is not Injun Nick," he whispered.

"Are you going in there?"

The red-skin nodded slightly, and a cold thrill went to Richard Redhilt's heart.

Was Injun Nick going to try conclusions with Captain Coldgrip in the dark?

The thought was enough to thrill him.

The Indian laid his hand coolly on the heavy wooden latch of the door.

He was seen to take a long breath and then he threw it open and crossed the step.

Richard Redhilt threw up his six-shooter, and stepped back and touched the trigger.

For a moment after Injun Nick's entrance there was no sound, and then the Centipede heard a struggle inside.

"He has found the captain!" ejaculated Richard going forward. "Injun Nick has the eyes of an owl for night work. He is giving him grip for grip. Ah! my dear captain, the Tinaja game didn't work in Camp Bonanza!"

Meanwhile, two men were struggling in the darkness beyond the open cabin door.

"I am here, Nick," cried Richard springing forward. "Do you want any help?"

"A match," said the Indian's voice.

The Broadway Centipede struck two lucifers on the logs and leaned forward with them as the light flashed up.

"Great Jericho! this man is Diamond Dan!" he cried, looking down into the face under the Indian's hands.

Injun Nick raised his eyes to his pard and showed his teeth in a ferocious grin.

"Can it be that he is the man from Tinaja?" continued Richard for the man in the red-skin's power had been choked into unconsciousness.

Injun Nick shook his head.

"The net caught a fish but not the right one," he said. "Diamond Dan is not the man from Tinaja. We will see what he says."

Richard was impatient to see the prisoner restored to his senses.

The adventure had terminated most strangely.

Diamond Dan the New York sport and the person who had but lately escaped from the hands of the Camp Bonanza pards had been found in the cabin which was thought to hold Captain Coldgrip!

The surprise brought about by this discovery was visible on the Indian's face. He had caught the wrong man, but he wanted Diamond Dan all the same.

It did not take long to restore the sport to consciousness.

"You've got me again," he said, looking at Richard and his red pard. "You didn't know I war here, though?"

"No," said the Centipede.

"I found Little Lot's cabin without much trouble. I knew he was gone away, and I expected to remain here for awhile undisturbed, but you came unexpectedly. Richard, you've entirely forgotten the old pardship."

"Entirely," echoed Richard Redhilt, coldly. "You have followed me from New York, Diamond Dan. You are not contented with the share of the spoil you got; you want the real prize of the game. I don't give it up. Your time has come."

"I expect it has," said Diamond Dan. "I see now that I didn't kill your red tiger. I wish to Heaven I had! He dare not give me a chance now."

Injun Nick was glaring like a Malay at the man he had discovered and throttled. He would rather have found Captain Coldgrip, but he seemed to be satisfied with the New York sport.

"Are you pards, Diamond?" suddenly asked Richard.

"Who?"

"You and Captain Coldgrip."

"No," said the prisoner, starting. "Is that man here?"

"He isn't a thousand miles away," was the reply.

"Which means that he is here," Dan said. "What! me that man's pard? Jerusalem, no! Why, we don't league with the men who hunt us, Richard."

"Not often," smiled the Centipede.

At that moment Injun Nick caught his master's eye.

"Diamond Dan, what's your choice—fingers or rope?" the red-skin asked.

"There's not much difference," said the New Yorker, with a shudder.

"Speak!" said the Indian.

"I won't!" was the answer.

"Call the boys," said Injun Nick to Richard.

The Centipede went out, and the Indian stepped back and watched Diamond Dan.

"You don't remember favors, Injun Nick," said the sport to his guard.

There was no reply, but the red-skin seemed suddenly interested.

"You have forgotten that night in New York after the circus when the two gamblers from the Bowery cornered you for your winnings," Diamond Dan went on. "You don't remember how I played a hand at the risk of my life and thereby kept you on the hills. No!" bitterly. "You are one of those men who are cursed with short memories. I saved your life that night to be choked here for a man who will throw you aside when he no longer wants you."

Diamond Dan looked the Indian in the eye while he spoke.

All at once Injun Nick leaned forward and his hand went to his head.

"Injun Nick has not forgotten, but this overbalances the New York play," he hissed, tearing off the bandages that hid the wound made by Diamond Dan's revolver scarcely three hours before.

The New York sport felt his heart sink.

The next moment half a dozen bronzed men were at the open door, and others coming up, pushed them into the cabin.

"Injun Nick yields to you, gents," said the voice of Richard Redhilt, as his hand covered Diamond Dan. "This man came here to steal and to kill. Let the sentence passed some hours ago be carried out now."

The foremost men came forward, and the Gotham Sport was in their midst for the second time that night.

Ten minutes later a human body swung under the best bough of a tree within the camp's boundary, and Richard Redhilt, looking triumphantly at it, said to the Indian at his side:

"Now for Captain Coldgrip. When he is out of the way the game is won; not a minute before."

CHAPTER XX.

A FORCED BETRAYAL.

NOT far from Richard Redhilt stood the very man of whom he spoke to Injun Nick.

The body of Diamond Dan swung in the light of several torches, and Captain Coldgrip saw that the lynchers' work, if quickly, had been well done.

"One out of the three will never face the music in New York," he said to himself. "Diamond Dan, hung by order of his own thug, will never go back in chains to Gotham. I cannot say that of you, Richard, though you seem to be in the ascendancy now. You and your Indian consider the game nearly won. Well, it looks that way—to you. Diamond Dan dead, and Mormon Luke likely so, and Captain Coldgrip probably discovered by the ferret eyes of Injun Nick. This is the lay-out as it appears just at this moment in Camp Bonanza."

The lynchers went away in a body and Richard and his red pard soon followed.

Close around the tree the ground was dark, and when the torches had been withdrawn the body of the hanged man was not visible.

Captain Coldgrip, still dressed as the man from Tinaja, glided forward and reached the motionless body.

He soon found the hand of Diamond Dan, and his fingers were at the pulse.

"Dead!" he murmured, a moment later. "These men don't do their work half-way. They did not leave till they knew there was no life left in this man."

Captain Coldgrip might have resumed, if a step had not attracted him, and the next moment he stepped back and reached the tree.

"Dead as a smelt," he heard a voice say from the spot where he had just stood. "I tied the knot, an' fixed it as I whispered to him I would, but ther rope slipped."

Diamond Dan had had a friend, then, among the lynchers. The thought startled the Gotham Vidocq, and by leaning forward he could see the outlines of a man who was not very tall, nor compactly built.

All at once Captain Coldgrip stepped forward, and as his hand fell upon the man's shoulder and almost lifted him from his feet, he said, low but sternly:

"A word at your risk, my man! I may be the very person you don't want to see. Who are you?"

"Santa Fe Sam."

"Very well. You help hang this man?"

"I had to help, but I did him a favor, if he war yer friend."

"Yes—fixed the rope so as to give him a chance. I have just heard you say that. You don't know me?"

"No, only that you're the man who came in a while after sundown—from Tinaja, somebody said."

"I am that man," said the detective. "Come with me."

Santa Fe Sam hesitated; he even drew back.

"You don't want to kick anywhere along the line," said the captain. "I am here on business of the utmost importance. Besides, I didn't want that man hanged, and you helped do it. You will come with me!"

"I will," said the tough.

"I may make it interesting for you," continued the sleuth-bond; and the two men walked toward the western side of the camp together, leaving Diamond Dan swinging where the roughs of Bonanza had left him at Richard Redhilt's commands.

No halt was made until the camp was behind the pair, and Captain Coldgrip had discovered that his companion was by no means his equal in physical strength, although as tough as a pine knot.

"Whom do they say I am?" suddenly asked the captain glancing toward the group of cabins called Camp Bonanza.

"A man from Tinaja," was the reply.

"When did you hear that last?"

"Just before we hung the chap back yonder."

"Is that your opinion?"

"Yes."

"How long have you been one of Richard Redhilt's pards?"

"For two years."

"You came down here from Gold Eye."

"From Gold Eye."

The little man seemed communicative enough, but the test had not come.

"I believe you are bound to Richard by an oath?" said the captain with a faint smile.

"The rest are," answered Santa Fe Sam.

"Why not you?"

"I swar ter no livin' man," said the little sport with emphasis. "I'm ag'in' oaths—dead set ag'in' 'em; but I use plenty ov ther other kind when I think ther occasion requires."

A faint smile was seen at the corners of Captain Coldgrip's mouth.

"But Richard took you, for all that?" he said.

"Mebbe he had ter but thet's neither hyer nor thar, is it?"

"No. Now, since you are not oath-bound, I want you to talk straight," continued the New York detective. "When Richard Redhilt left Gold Eye for this new retreat he had a prisoner?"

Santa Fe Sam looked at Captain Coldgrip and seemed to measure him carefully, but did not reply.

"This prisoner was a young girl," the detective went on.

"See hyer, cap'n. What ef I don't say yes an' no when yer want me ter?" exclaimed Santa Fe Sam with grim humor.

"I expect answers and truthful ones," was the reply.

"What's ther penalty for silence or short yard goods?"

"Death!"

"Jehu! yer don't mean that? Did you come all ther way from Tinaja, wherever that is, ter find suthin' out about this—"

Santa Fe Sam caught himself. He was about to say "this girl" which would have practically answered the sport-detective's questions.

"Yes, I came here to discover her," Coldgrip said. "She left Gold Eye with Richard?"

"No, sir; she left with Injun Nick."

"It is all the same," smiled the captain.

"Master and man are one in many respects. The girl is in camp?"

"In Bonanza?"

"Yes."

"I'll go bail for her if she is?" exclaimed Santa Fe Sam, almost instantly.

"I haven't seen her since she left Gold Eye."

"And you have been here ever since this camp was founded?"

"Ever since."

Captain Coldgrip looked disappointed for a moment.

Could it be that after all he had caught a man who knew nothing of Bertha's whereabouts? He gave Santa Fe Sam a look that seemed to doubt the truth of his last replies.

"It ar' a dead open-an'-shut fact, cap'n," said the little man, emphatically. "Ef I've seen thet girl since ther day Injun Nick held her away from Richard, may my paradise wings be artificial! Ef she's in Camp Bonanza, I don't know it."

"We will say, then, that she isn't here," said Captain Coldgrip. "Does Richard ever leave camp secretly?"

"He comes and goes when he pleases."

"And Injun Nick?"

"He does the same."

Santa Fe Sam seemed to believe that he was not helping the hunter much by his answers.

"I guess I'm not ther man yer want, cap'n," he suddenly said. "Thar's a fellow in camp who could tell yer all."

"Who is that?"

"Richard Redhilt."

Captain Coldgrip bit his lip over Sam's impudence, and the next moment the hand that encircled the little man's arm closed with a suddenness that almost raised him off his feet.

"A man like you generally sees everything," he said. "If I saw you in New York I would set you down for a man who knows a good deal outside of his own business. You say that Richard Redhilt and Injun Nick come and go when they please?"

"I said thet."

"Dare you say you have never watched them, Santa Fe Sam?"

The little sport of the camp recoiled from the question and from the eyes that watched him like a hawk.

"Tell me! I want no lies now; the time has passed for them. You have followed Richard and his red right bower. There's a bushel of curiosity in you, Santa Fe Sam. You saw that the girl left Gold Eye with the Indian; you wanted to know what had become of her."

"Warn't that nat'ral?" asked the little sport.

"The most natural thing in the world," was the reply. "Now go on."

"The night we pulled the boy up—"

"One moment," interrupted Captain Coldgrip.

"Who is the boy?"

"Silver Silas, the young chap who got stuck on the girl in Gold Eye. We caught him about Camp Bonanza a short time ago an' we gave 'im rope up on ther mountain."

"You lynched him?" said the detective, between his teeth.

"We swung him off accordin' ter orders, but I fixed ther knot for him, too. Silver Silas an' I war friends in Gold Eye, an' I couldn't see 'im jerked off without a chance."

"Did your scheme succeed as well as when you fixed the knot for Diamond Dan?" asked the Gotham detective, with a smile.

"Better," said Santa Fe Sam. "It war a success then. Ther day after thet hangin', I went up ther mountain ter bury ther boy, as I said, but he war gone. I never told Richard nor ther boys. I didn't hev ter."

"You deserve a copper medal for your success," laughed the detective. "You haven't seen Silver Silas since?"

"No! Jumpin' Jericho! do yer think he'd hover 'round hyer arter a turn like thet?"

"I think not. Now, what did you see the night you hanged Silver Silas?"

"I followed Richard Redhilt from camp. He led me an odd chase, an' sometimes I thought he war onter me, but I guess he warn't. He guided me ter a gulch which we've named Satan's Throat, since we came hyer. I lost him thar."

"Lost him entirely?" exclaimed Captain Coldgrip.

"Slick an' clean. Two hours later, or tharabouts, he came back to camp. Three times since I've tracked 'im ter ther Throat, but I always lose him. Once I follered Injun Nick ter ther same place—lost him, too."

"Do they always go at night?"

"Always."

The New York spotter was silent for a moment.

"Show me the gulch," he said, suddenly. "Show me the place where you always lose those two men."

"If I do, I shall hev ter git away from hyer."

"I'll make your going away an item, Santa Fe Sam," was the reply.

"I don't mind Richard so much. I feel myself capable ov keepin' cl'ar ov him, but thet tiger-cat he keeps near 'im—we call 'im Injun Nick. He's Satan in vermilion."

"You shall keep clear of him, too," said the Captain. "Now for Satan's Throat."

The tireless tracker felt that the capture and the inquisition had not been for naught. He did not try to conceal the triumph that shone in his eyes, and he wondered if Santa Fe Sam did not suspect that he was more than a simple rancher from Tinaja.

It was a journey of some minutes to the high-walled gulch, from the spot where Santa Fe Sam had been pumped dry.

The little sport led the detective to the middle of the place.

The moon had gone down and objects in the gulch, the broken rocks and the dark creepers hanging to the walls, were barely seen.

"It war always about hyer," said Santa Fe Sam, pointing to the wall on his left. "I've searched ther place time an' ag'in, cap'n, but never found anything. I war afraid ter come in daylight. I played owl an' fox, but it war no good. They didn't go inter ther solid wall, thet's sartain."

"I will find the clew," was the determined response. "I am here for that purpose. Now, Santa Fe Sam, will you go back to camp?"

"To Richard Redhilt an' Injun Nick arter this work?" exclaimed the little sport, drawing back. "I ruther guess not!"

"You can't stay with me. I don't want you."

"Then I'll take ther back track," said the traitor. "You said you'd make it an item for me if I played fair with yer."

"So I will."

Captain Coldgrip took a small note-book from an inner pocket and seated himself on a bowlder near by.

The next moment he wrote rapidly in the starlight, tore the leaf out when he had finished, and handed it to the puzzled Santa Fe Sam.

The little sport read for a minute and then uttered a startling exclamation.

The paper was an order on the First National Bank in Denver for two thousand dollars, and bore the signature of Captain Coldgrip.

It was the name that had taken Santa Fe Sam's breath.

CHAPTER XXI.

FATAL SUCCESS.

"GREAT Jehosaphat! ar' you ther cap'n?" ejaculated Santa Fe Sam, staring at the New York detective at whose lips was a quiet smile.

"I'm the man," was the reply.

"It takes ther trick," continued the little sport, his astonishment increasing. "They'd like ter see yer as Cap'n Coldgrip in camp."

"They will see me there, but not till I'm ready to show up," said the detective. "If you go to Denver the check you hold will be cashed without discount."

"It'd set me on my pins ag'in, wouldn't it? By ther jumpin' Jericho! I b'lieve I'll take it in. It's better than stayin' hyer in fear ov thet Injun's red hand. Good-by, cap'n."

Santa Fe Sam held out his hand which Captain Coldgrip took.

All at once the little sport drew back and looked at the detective's right hand.

"I've heard 'em say you had a hand ov ice," he said. "They didn't lie, either. Thar's no blood in it, cap'n. Jehu! I wouldn't hev it at my throat for all Colorado."

Captain Coldgrip laughed as the two hands separated, and the next moment the figure of Santa Fe Sam had vanished down the gulch.

For several minutes he stood motionless in the starlight and then he went to work.

He was confident that Santa Fe Sam had given him the truth as far as it went.

It had taken a good many questions to get at it, but he had succeeded at last, and believed that he now stood in the vicinity of Bertha Bethol.

If Santa Fe Sam had been baffled by Richard

Redhilt and Injun Nick on their visits to the gulch, he mentally resolved that he would not be.

"Bertha first and then the Centipede and his right bower!" he said, with resolution to himself. "I am here to play out a game begun in New York, and an oath taken over the dead with an orphan in my arms, shall goad me to the end."

An hour passed, and the figure of Captain Coldgrip was still flitting hither and thither in Satan's Throat.

He was a tracker defeated by no obstacles, he examined both sides of the gulch wall with the eyes of a born spotter, and kept himself prepared for the coming of any foe.

In some places there were large cracks in the walls. These suggested natural retreats, and were examined one by one.

Meanwhile, Santa Fe Sam had kept his word not to go back to Camp Bonanza, and while Captain Coldgrip was searching the gulch, he was streaking it over the mountain toward Del Norte, from which Denver could be reached by rail.

Diamond Dan still swung under the bough, his game played out at a rope's end, and more than one crime avenged by the lynchers' noose.

Captain Coldgrip seemed to find something substantial at last.

He found a loose stone where the wall appeared solid, and at a place which he had passed twenty times.

No exclamations of joy fell from his tongue, but his eyes got a new light, and he pulled the stone back, revealing a dark opening which strongly suggested a cavern.

The New York sleuth-hound did not hesitate to enter.

He knew that the gulches and canyons of Colorado abounded in wonderful caverns, for his search for Richard Redhilt and his beautiful prize had discovered many such.

The stone fell back to its place when he had crossed the threshold of darkness.

He struck a match and held it near the dusty floor of the corridor he was in.

"I am on somebody's track," he said, for before him was the print of a human foot.

Captain Coldgrip pushed deeper and deeper into the unknown place.

The path seemed to ascend gradually, and all at once he drew back from the brink of a wall.

A deep cavern was below him, one whose depths his little torch could not explore. He had reached the end of the long corridor.

This cavern was not more wonderful than some he had explored elsewhere, but it possessed an interest above them all.

Captain Coldgrip firmly believed that the lost girl of Gotham was not far away—perhaps somewhere in the cavern beneath.

To be halted by the sudden ending of the corridor, did not daunt the tireless man-hunter.

He felt the wall that rose above him; he found a piece of iron fastened into the stone; it would bear his weight.

"This iron was put here to hold a rope," was his conclusion. "If the rope is here, it must be found, or I must get one for my purpose."

Here and there in the wall were shallow shelves, and on one, after a search, Captain Coldgrip found a coil of rope, one end of which showed that it had encircled a piece of iron.

He went back to the staple with eyes full of victory, and made the rope fast about it. Then he dropped it slowly into the cave beneath, until it had been paid out and hung straight along the wall.

Without hesitation, the detective caught the rope and swung his body over the abyss.

All was darkness underneath, and his keenest look could not show his hand before his face. But he went resolutely down hand over hand, with all his senses on the alert and ready to meet any enemy who might present himself.

Captain Coldgrip touched a hard floor of stone at last, and stepped back from the rope.

He heard nothing, and the darkness was still the most intense.

After a few minutes of rest, he began to explore the new cavern with his hands.

The walls were smooth, and he found the place almost circular, but his exploration led him to a large opening that led elsewhere.

Eager to continue the hunt, Captain Coldgrip plunged forward, and soon stood in what he supposed was another subterranean room, larger than the circular one.

He drew a match and struck it.

The light flashed up and began to dissipate the darkness.

All at once the detective started, and gave vent to a strange exclamation.

Not more than fifteen feet away a young girl was gazing at him with eyes filled with wonderment.

The two looked at one another as if each regarded the other as not being flesh and blood.

"Thank Heaven! Claude Coldgrip!" cried the girl, suddenly springing forward.

"You are Bertha!" exclaimed the detective, meeting her half-way, and the young beauty sunk with an ejaculation of joy into his arms.

Captain Coldgrip had found the lost girl at last, and he could not conceal the pleasure it

gave him while he gazed into her face and called her Bertha Bethol!

The little torch had gone out, and the two stood in almost palpable darkness, and exchanged tokens of joy and friendship.

"You come soon upon the heels of Injun Nick," said Bertha.

"What! has he been here?" cried the detective.

"He came and went not long ago—perhaps this same night, if this is night," was the reply. "He told me that you had come as a man from Tinaja, but that you would never leave as that person."

"He unmasked me, then," said the captain. "I did not misjudge the shrewd red-skin. I know now how to play the next game."

In the light of a little lamp, which the girl found, the reunited friends conversed a long time in the cavern.

Bertha narrated her strange and thrilling adventures from the time she deserted the detective to hunt Richard Redhilt for herself, to the present meeting.

Her auditor did not interrupt her once to the close of the story.

"Now that I have found you, the plays will be rapid," he said. "Vengeance will not be delayed. He is here. I know where to find the cool Satan who horrified New York one morning, and the man who was snatched from me by a railroad accident."

"But he knows you, too," said Bertha, quickly. "He knows that the man from Tinaja is Captain Claude Coldgrip."

"If the information pleases him he is welcome to it," said the detective with a smile. "We will not have to fight in the dark any longer. This suits me exactly."

"But the Indian? He is the greatest foe of the two."

"That is true, girl. Injun Nick has all the elements of the cool, calculating devil. I saw this when he was the Scarlet Hercules of the Madison Square Circus. But what of that? I still have the honor to be Claude Coldgrip, that red scorpion's equal, let us trust."

Captain Coldgrip had hardly spoken when he sprang up and rushed to the natural doorway between the two caverns.

Bertha watched him and held her breath.

What had he heard?

For several moments his splendid figure was seen in the door, and then it disappeared.

The quick ears of the detective had heard a noise, and one that took him across the dark circular cave with a bowie along his arm.

He walked straight to where he had left the rope. He put up his left hand and moved it over the wall. It came in contact with nothing but stone!

All at once it seemed to dawn upon Captain Coldgrip's mind that the rope was gone!

He and the girl were prisoners in the cavern!

The detective uttered no cry at this discovery, although it was one decidedly startling.

In all probability Injun Nick had come back, and the theft of the dangling rope was his work.

Captain Coldgrip became certain that the rope was missing before he thought of going back to Bertha.

He explored the walls inch by inch. Outwardly he kept his temper, but inwardly he seemed on fire.

His almost sudden reappearance to the impatient girl startled her.

"Bertha," he said, calmly, "is there more than one entrance to your underground house?"

"I never knew of more," was the reply. "I came down here by a rope, in the arms of Injun Nick."

The detective felt his teeth meet at the mention of the red-skin's name.

"Something has happened," said the girl, laying a hand softly on his arm. "I believe I can read the disaster in your eyes. The rope is gone!"

The detective looked surprised.

"Yes, it has disappeared," he said, between his teeth. "We are the birds in this cage. But, by the eternal heavens! it shall not hold us long!"

He leaped up and looked for a moment like a handsome madman.

"I don't see how we are to escape," said Bertha, trying to be calm. "As I have told you I firmly believe that this place has but one entrance. I have spent hours searching for others. In the wall of the circular cavern is a large hole, but it is twenty feet from the ground and I have not been able to reach it. More than once my lamp has revealed it to me, but if it leads anywhere, why do not Richard and Injun Nick use it?"

"Where is it?" exclaimed the detective, snatching up the lamp and rushing toward the round cavern.

Bertha saw him bound through the doorway and then lost sight of him.

A moment later she heard a voice that went with a thrill to her heart.

"How is Tinaja, captain?" said this voice, whose intonation was triumph itself. "You have found the New York gold-finch, but the cage holds you as well. This is what the finding of the old trail costs you. We may not have the

pleasure of sending Captain Coldgrip after Diamond Dan and Mormon Luke, but we will see that he quits the game all the same. There is but one entrance to this Colorado tomb, captain, and the rope stairway has been taken away. What do you think of the hand Richard Redhilt holds?"

The voice ended in a laugh and left the detective almost spell-bound in the round cavern, with a lamp in one hand and a cocked revolver in the other.

He knew the speaker by his voice. It was the Centipede himself.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SPELL OF BLACK EYES.

"We have caged the New York tiger, Injun Nick. This was a most unexpected play. Now the Colorado drama will not last much longer. I don't see how it can."

"He has but one chance, captain," said the dark-faced man to whom Richard Redhilt spoke. "One chance? What is that?"

"He might reach the hole in the wall of the round cavern."

The Broadway Centipede put down the glass of liquor he was raising to his lips and stared at his red right bower.

The two men were in Richard's shanty in Camp Bonanza, and it was the night after the events just recorded.

"Can he do that, Nick?" asked the Centipede, eagerly. "That opening must be twenty feet above the floor of the round cave. Captain Coldgrip has nothing helpful at his command."

The Indian looked away and made no answer.

"Why didn't you think of this before?" pursued Richard, biting his lips under the red-skin's silence. "He has been there since last night. By heavens! the New York detective must not escape."

"He shall not," said Injun Nick through his clinched teeth. "Captain Coldgrip has reached the end of his rope, and death is there!"

The positiveness with which the Indian spoke made the sport's eyes glisten.

"The tunnel that leads to the opening in the round wall you tell me is a mystery," he said watching his red pard narrowly.

"So it is. There isn't a fox in Colorado that has ever found it out."

"Good! then if Captain Coldgrip does not reach the hole he is absolutely safe."

Injun Nick gave his pard a look that made him continue.

"No, I don't doubt you, Nick," he said. "But you will pardon my eagerness to be assured that we have the last trick in our hands."

He leaned across the table and laid his hand on Injun Nick's dark wrist.

"Be assured, then," said the red-skin rising and shaking off the hand. "You have seen me play gladiator as you call it in the show ring?"

"Yes," said Richard.

"Well, before long I am going to play it again."

"Not back in New York?"

"No, in the gulch cavern."

Richard Redhilt uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"With Captain Coldgrip?" he ejaculated.

Injun Nick's eyes said yes before his lips framed the monosyllable.

"I owe him one for the clutch he gave me between Alabaster and Gold Eye the night I was carrying your dispatches," continued the Indian. "This hand may not be as cold as his, but it is as deadly. Whenever I talk about that night my throat actually gets cold and I seem to feel those bloodless fingers against my windpipe. Yes, I am going back to Satan's Throat ere long, and I shall meet and settle forever with the sleuth-hound that has tracked you from New York."

Richard did not remonstrate.

He wanted something of this kind to happen, yet he did not like the thought of Captain Coldgrip getting a chance at his indispensable pard.

He could not lose Injun Nick; he would sooner spare his right arm.

"I will go alone!" was the answer. "You shall not know about the duel until it is over."

Richard settled back obliged to content himself with the Indian's decision.

Suddenly the door of the cabin, which stood slightly ajar, was flung open, and one of the inhabitants of the camp made his appearance.

"Captain, a woman," he announced.

"A woman?" echoed Richard Redhilt, leaping up. "In Satan's name, what angel has come to us?"

"She's an angel, sure enough," grinned the man who had made the announcement. "She came in a while ago, and found four of us deep in a game at Poker Perry's shanty. Just got hyer from toward Del Norte."

"Alone?"

"She's alone now, but she paid some one ter guide her down."

"Where is she?"

"At Perry's, I guess."

Richard Redhilt looked at Injun Nick, who could not conceal his surprise.

"What's your opinion, Nick?" he asked. "Is the world finding us all at once? You've heard what Pacific Paul has reported: a woman has come to Camp Bonanza. What does it mean?"

"I'll know when I see her," said the Indian, calmly; and then he continued, speaking to himself:

"I don't like women in any game, and this one I am sure I shall hate."

It was true that Camp Bonanza had a new visitor—a very beautiful woman, hardly past thirty, with a queenly figure and dazzling black eyes.

While Pacific Paul was reporting her arrival to the most important citizens of the camp, she was seated in Poker Perry's cabin, watching three men who were pretending to be interested in a game of cards.

Her presence, it was evident, was a drawback to an enjoyment of the game. The three gamblers would glance furtively at her through their long lashes and wonder who she was.

She told them that she was Gunnison Jessie, and that she was going south to Durango, where she had interests, the value and nature of which she did not see fit to state.

Among the players was a man, Mexican in build and looks. His skin was a dark yellow, his eyes small, and his hair long and intensely black.

Durango Diaz was one of the human puzzles of Camp Bonanza.

Richard Redhilt knew but little about him, but he was willing to enlist this man among his sworn pards because he had the activity of a cat and the cunning of the serpent.

It was Durango Diaz who watched the woman most.

He sat in a position at the gambling table that enabled him to eye her closely, and at the same time escape her scrutiny.

He grew nervous as he watched her, and while he waited for Pacific Paul to come back with Richard if not with Injun Nick.

"Five years make a good deal of difference," said Durango Diaz to himself. "She hasn't had a good look at me yet, but she can't recognize me. I was smooth-faced like a boy then. *Sacrista!* what fetches that beautiful viper to Camp Bonanza? Going to Durango, eh? Then, in the Virgin's name, why doesn't she go on?"

Just beyond the door of the cabin stood the horse which the woman said had carried her a good many miles. The animal looked well-blown, but his magnificent limbs told that he was good for many miles yet.

Durango Diaz played poorly under the spell cast over him by the arrival of the strange beauty.

His brother gamblers rallied him across the table, and threw out some provoking hints about black eyes and a pretty figure.

Suddenly the form of Pacific Paul appeared in the doorway, and beyond him was seen the figure of Richard Redhilt, with Injun Nick, herculean and eagle-eyed near by like the shadow of fate.

Gunnison Jessie rose as the Broadway Centipede crossed the door.

"This is the lady, cap'n," said Pacific Paul, by way of introduction. "This gentleman is Cap'n Richard, of Camp Bonanza."

The eyes of the two had already met, and the new Cleopatra stood face to face with the handsome and hunted Broadway Centipede.

Near the door, with his cold, black eyes fixed on her as if he would read her through, stood Injun Nick as motionless as a statue.

He saw Richard Redhilt do something quite unlooked for—hold out a hand and welcome the woman to the hospitalities of the camp.

"A woman is always a viper whose sting is death!" grated the Indian at this. "This one is beautiful as beauty goes, but we don't want her here. She is dangerous. If she stays I may have to throttle her or dispose of her in some other way. What does she call herself? Ah! yes—Gunnison Jessie! Ten to one that that name is a covert lie."

The game interrupted by the Centipede's arrival had been resumed again, but Durango Diaz was making some terrible plays.

"For God's sake excuse me!" he whispered at last across the table. "I am sick—deadly sick. Make it three handed, and let me go."

He gave up his cards as if he was not to be kept in the game at any price, and glided from the cabin without having been fairly seen by the beauty from the North.

When he got beyond the door, he threw a look of self-congratulation and deliverance into the cabin.

"Thank the saints, she didn't see me!" he ejaculated. "If it wasn't for one thing, I'd take her horse—it would give me away. Durango Diaz, you've got your walking-papers from Bonanza in a manner totally unlooked for. That woman—"

He stopped suddenly, for he had started off, and had run into Injun Nick, who had been regarding him with glowing eyes.

"Jupiter!" he exclaimed, recoiling, but the hand of the red-skin darting forward, closed like a handcuff on his wrist.

"You know that woman in there?" said the Indian, leaning forward and speaking in a whisper.

"I don't," snapped Durango Diaz. "I am willing to swear by my dead—"

"No lies!" was the interruption, and the eyes of Injun Nick suddenly got a dangerous glitter.

He drew Durango Diaz away from the cabin before he spoke again. He was the Mexican's master in strength, and Diaz had to submit.

"Tell me, now," he continued, addressing the yellow sport. "You have seen that woman before?"

"I have."

"Where?"

"In the City of Mexico."

"Who was she then?"

Durango Diaz showed his teeth.

"My wife," he said.

Injun Nick exhibited some surprise, as well he might, for the revelation was as strange as it was unexpected.

"Why are you running away from her?" he asked, with a faint smile at the corners of his mouth.

"If you knew what I know, you would run, too," he said, looking up into the Indian's face. "For God's sake, Injun Nick, let me get the start of that Cuban snake!"

"Cuban, eh?"

"She came to the City of Mexico from Cuba. Her blood is hot, like lava. The last I heard of her she was in Utah, a rich Mormon's wife. You can bet your life I didn't hunt her up. Can't I go now?"

Durango Diaz knew that he could not get away until Injun Nick chose to release his wrist.

"One more question," said the red-skin.

"Out with it. I'm in torture now."

"Whose wife is that woman? What is her Mormon husband's name?"

"I don't know," said Durango Diaz. "By the holy water! this is true, Injun Nick."

The red fingers relaxed, the Indian stepped back, and Durango Diaz sprung away with an ejaculation of joy.

He was out of sight in an instant.

"I knew she was a viper!" hissed Injun Nick going back toward the cabin. "If she was Durango's wife, and is now a Mormon's woman, she is out for no good."

He had almost reached the open door when he stopped and drew back with his eyes fastened on the pair who had just come out—Richard Redhilt and the woman from the North.

"I'll break the spell when I get your ear, captain," said Injun Nick, looking at the Centipede who was walking at the woman's side. "She hasn't been here an hour and she has thrown the net over your head. You don't want to take up with a woman who was once Durango Diaz's wife."

He followed the pair down the darkened street of the camp and saw Richard Redhilt open the door of Little Lot's empty cabin.

"I hope you'll rest many days in Bonanza," he said to her. "To-morrow I will give you my cabin which is better than this."

The watching Indian ground his teeth and ten minutes later he burst into Richard Redhilt's cabin and clutched his arm.

"Great God, captain, what do you mean? That woman is Durango Diaz's cast-off wife, and the queen of a Mormon's harem," were his startling words.

Richard Redhilt's eyes seemed to flash.

"I'll bet a thousand she is neither!" he said.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LIE WELL STUCK TO.

INJUN NICK hated women. It was the man's nature and he humored it.

He believed that Durango Diaz had told the truth—that the person who called herself Gunnison Jessie was his wife, and when Richard Redhilt, like a man under a spell, declared that she was neither the Mexican's wife nor the Mormon's mistress, he (Injun Nick) turned on his heel and walked sullenly away.

The Broadway Centipede knew his red pard too well to let him go off thus.

He sprang to the door of the cabin and called him back; Injun Nick halted turned around and waited calmly for him to proceed.

"If you know this prove it," said Richard. "Produce Durango Diaz and stand him before the woman. I believe she has not played double before me."

"I will prove it," came from between the Indian's clinched teeth and Richard Redhilt was left alone again.

Let us follow Injun Nick.

With latent fire in his eyes, he walked straight to the cabin owned and occupied by Durango Diaz. A man started and uttered a cry when he opened the door, and the Indian stood face to face with a frightened Mexican.

He had not arrived a moment too soon, for Durango was getting ready for flight; the condition of things about him showed this to the quick eyes of the Indian.

"You know what you told me?" said Injun Nick, transfixing the Mexican with a look that added to his fright.

"About my—that woman at Poker Perry's?"

"Yes."

"Well, what about her?"

"Richard must believe that she is here in borrowed plumes," continued the Indian. "You must go with me to her first—"

Durango Diaz interrupted the red pard with an ejaculation of horror.

What! face the woman from whose presence he was about to fly—the woman whose coming to Camp Bonanza under a new name was enough to chill his blood?

Was the Indian mad?

"You don't want to drag me to her, Injun Nick?" he said, his voice now in pleading tones. "You can take my sworn statement to Captain Richard. I swear to the truth by the saints of the Virgin! I married that woman in the City of Mexico; she was called Ninez, then. That was her Cuban name. Let me swear to this, Injun Nick, and you can go back to Richard with my oath."

But the Centipede's red right bower was resolute.

"A meeting between you and the pretty viper is the only thing that will convince me."

Durango Diaz set his teeth hard like a man who had to make the best of a bad bargain.

"Show me the sorceress!" he exclaimed.

"Where is she, Injun Nick?"

"At Little Lot's cabin. To-morrow, if she stays, she is to have the best quarters in the camp—the log palace of Richard himself."

"Is the captain struck?"

"Charmed!" laughed the Indian.

"Like I was, till I found her out," said Durango Diaz. "I'll be ready in a minute."

The Mexican went to one corner of the cabin and armed himself with a small dagger, which he concealed where he could get at it in a second, then turning to the Indian, announced himself as being ready to face the arrival from Del Norte.

Injun Nick watched the Mexican like a lynx during the walk from cabin to cabin as if he was not satisfied that Durango's decision was genuine.

The Mexican walked forward with compressed lips and gleaming eyes.

He now seemed anxious to meet the woman he was so eager to avoid a few moments ago.

"She'll show the tiger when she sees me," he said, to himself, "but I've got Injun Nick to help me get away with a whole skin."

A light beyond the little window of the absent sport's cabin told that Gunnison Jessie had not retired, and Injun Nick saw her figure through the glass as he drew near.

The Indian's knock was immediately answered by the new-comer to the secret camp and the lamplight fell upon the two men.

Injun Nick took the Mexican's arm, and almost lifted him across the threshold.

"Pardon me," said the red-skin, to Jessie, "but do you know this man?"

Durango Diaz had flashing eyes and a quivering figure.

The woman leaned forward and looked into his face while his suddenly-assumed bravery seemed to desert him.

They were face to face now and Injun Nick was watching both.

"Who is he?" asked Gunnison Jessie, mastering a wonderful emotion as she turned her eyes upon Injun Nick. "And why do you bring him to me?"

The questions startled the Indian more than a spring at Durango's throat would have done.

"You ought to know," he said. "We call him Durango Diaz and he has called you his wife."

Gunnison Jessie gave the Mexican a sharp look.

"This man must be crazy!" she said, glancing at the Indian again. "Let me test him. I, his wife? Is this true, Durango Diaz?"

The Mexican instinctively drew back.

He was now between two fires; the eyes of Injun Nick and the woman were riveted upon him.

"I'd give my head if I hadn't stopped to pack my duds," he said, to himself. "Hyer I am between sword an' lance, an' I don't know which way to run."

Gunnison Jessie had darted forward and her hand was on his arm.

Her eyes were sparkling like diamonds, and their flashes seemed to send cold chills through the Mexican's blood.

"Why don't you talk?" she cried. "Did you tell this man that I am your wife? I'd like to see the priest who married me to you! Your wife? When did you lose your head, Durango Diaz? And the white fingers, closing like a vise, seemed to be pushing their way to the bone."

At the same time the woman's eyes talked in another strain.

"Give me away here and your life won't be worth a dollar!" they said to the Mexican.

"Yes, I am your wife, but you don't want to proclaim the truth in Camp Bonanza."

Durango Diaz, in his predicament, glanced at the Indian.

"I have made a mistake," he said. "Sacrista! I thought this woman was once Madame Diaz, but I see that I have been deceived. They are near alike, but this one is not my wife."

Injun Nick showed plainly that he did not believe these words.

A dark scowl settled over his face, and in the depths of his eyes appeared a displeased look.

"You saw her at Poker Perry's," he said to the Mexican. "You told me after that she was your wife."

"I thought so then; I see my mistake now when I am so near."

"He knows I have never been his wife," said the woman, coming to Durango's rescue. "If I resemble the woman who has held that relation to him, may I never pass the gates of Paradise! I hate Mexicans!"

She spoke the last sentence in a manner that almost brought a smile to Durango Diaz's thin lips.

"I think she ought to," he said to himself.

Injun Nick looked like a person who sees victory declaring against him. He had given his word to Richard Redhilt that he would prove this woman an impostor, and he would.

"If you are not this Greaser's wife, when did you leave your Mormon husband?" he grated suddenly.

"I?"

"You!" hissed the Indian.

"Who says I have one?"

"This man who has swallowed his oath within the last thirty minutes!" said Injun Nick covering Durango with a red finger.

Gunnison Jessie recoiled a step and drew her magnificent figure to its full height.

"Is this the reception I receive in Camp Bonanza?" she exclaimed, facing Injun Nick like a storm. "Who are you that you hurl lies one after the other at me: I have proclaimed myself. I am Gunnison Jessie, going to Durango, and invited to rest here by Richard Redhilt, the boss of the camp. First, to you, I am a Greaser's wife; and next, a Mormon! What is the next hell-born falsehood? If friendless here I am not without protection. I have provided myself with means of defense. I believe I have heard of you. You are called Injun Nick."

The red-skin bowed slightly, but soon stood erect again.

"I want rest—I have had a long ride," the woman went on. "To-morrow, or whenever you please, confront me with any accusations you choose. The man yonder will swear that I never married him, and there is no living soul in Bonanza foolish enough to say on oath that I am the thing of a Mormon harem."

Injun Nick was taken aback by words like these.

"The woman is playing a game of bluff," he said under his breath. "I have seen enough to convince me that she is all Durango Diaz said she was, and if she is a rich Mormon's wife I'll bet my neck she came direct from Mormon Luke's harem. And that means that she has taken a hand in the game Richard Redhilt is playing against Captain Coldgrip."

Durango Diaz was ready to withdraw. His look told the Indian that he was eager to get beyond the woman's glance, and he had already shortened the distance to the door.

"I'll show you up yet," said Injun Nick to the woman. "Yes, I am the person you have called me Injun Nick. The captain may be captivated by your black eyes, but they're no more to me than dull quartz. Whatever your game is here, you sha'n't win. I warn you now. I learned to hate women when my mother left me to die in the mountains. The man I have brought to you has lied under your threatening eyes. You were once his wife, and you are now, if he isn't dead—the wife of Mormon Luke, the Salt Lake Croesus! Indian I am, but the white people have given me their language and many of their crimes. Come, liar!"

The last command was addressed to Durango Diaz, and a terrible look accompanied it. The Mexican would have shrunk to the black-eyed woman for protection if the red hand of Injun Nick had not encircled his arm.

"Good-night!" he said to Gunnison Jessie, as he almost dragged Durango from the cabin.

"Remember! I am the man you play against here!" And then he was gone.

The woman from the North stood breathless for a minute in the center of the little hut.

"This Indian is all they've said about him," she said to herself. "I shall not turn back because he is a human tiger, nor because I have been brought face to face with my Mexican husband. I did not expect to find the yellow cat here, and it was all I could do to keep my hands from his carcass. He knew it, too. I believe I have Richard Redhilt in the net, and if he is for me, I need not fear his red tiger. I did not expect to see a man as handsome as he is. He discounts Mormon Luke. If Richard had the money Luke has—Ah! I must not think of such things now! I came here to find the girl whom my Mormon lord would take to the Utah palace. She is here; the map that cost one man his life has told me this. By the living Heavens! Ninez is in the game to play it out! Injun Nick, Durango Diaz and Captain Coldgrip combined cannot baffle her. I have a friend in the Broadway Centipede."

"That is true," said a voice, and Ninez, starting back with a light cry, saw the handsome figure of Richard Redhilt in the door.

CHAPTER XXIV.

KNIFE TO KNIFE.

In a circular cavern, poorly illumined by the rays of a lamp held by a young girl, a man was hanging along a stone wall, his hands clinging to the edge of an opening above his head.

It was Captain Coldgrip, and the first break for liberty had been made.

Bertha's couch had been dragged from its place to the round cave, it had been placed in every conceivable position, and the determined detective had mounted it again and again.

At last, by a spring at the dark hole overhead, he had managed to catch the rim, and the couch falling from under him had left him hanging along the wall.

The girl uttered no exclamation of fear; she knew the man who had come to Camp Bonanza, and felt that he was thoroughly able to take care of himself.

It was night without, though darkness and daylight were one to the occupant of a cavern like the one in Satan's Throat.

Captain Coldgrip clung to his slight purchase until he had caught his breath, then he threw a triumphant look down at the girl, and began to draw himself up.

Bertha saw that he was to be successful, and when he had reached the opening, she could not suppress a cry of joy.

"A man like that must succeed!" she said. "Injun Nick is no match for Claude Coldgrip, who is my best friend."

"Go back to your old quarters," the detective said to the girl. "Let this cave and our work be concealed by darkness. I will find where this passage leads. It will not take me long."

Bertha gave him a last look, and returned to her old place.

"They may have thought I could not gain this opening," said the detective to himself, with a smile. "Richard Redhilt must have forgotten that I used to astonish the students of the Union Gymnasium with my agility. It stood me well a while ago; the last leap did it, and I hold a new hand."

Captain Coldgrip went down the dark and narrow corridor, which had rough walls and a low ceiling.

He knew not whither it led, but he was there to see. At times it was barely wide enough to admit of the passage of his body, and then it would widen suddenly, as if he had entered a cave.

For some distance he pursued his way, with a match now and then to dissipate the darkness.

If the floor of the corridor had ever been trodden by human feet, he could see no traces of them now.

"This must have an ending," he exclaimed. "I am not going back to Bertha till I have found it."

On, on went the cool detective, undismayed by the slow tour through the rock.

All at once he stopped.

"I smell the scents of the mountain!" he cried. "I am at the end of the tunnel."

It was true.

Captain Coldgrip, the New York spotter, had reached the end of the tortuous way, and in a moment he was looking down into a gulch whose bed was thirty feet beneath.

Thousands of stars shone brightly overhead, and their united splendor showed the detective the whitened boulders in the gulch, and the perpendicular walls.

"This is why Richard did not fear my escape by the hole in the wall of the round cave—he thought the prospect before me would baffle me," said the tireless spotter. "Aha, Richard! you don't know the man called Captain Coldgrip!"

For some minutes the detective viewed the scene beneath his perch before he spoke again.

His practiced eye had carefully calculated the distance to the bed of the gulch, and he had leaned out and felt the smooth wall with his hands.

The journey to the end of the subterranean tunnel had occupied more than an hour. While the way had nothing in it to turn one aside, it was tortuous like the windings of a rattlesnake.

Captain Coldgrip turned back at last.

There was a gleam of victory in his eye, as if the thirty feet between the opening and the bed of the gulch were not to bother him.

"I wish they hadn't finished Diamond Dan, but I could not prevent," he said. "Santa Fe Sam failed with his friendly knot, and what he had intended for a favor, proved Diamond's death. But one of the New York trio is left, for I am sure that Mormon Luke cannot hold out to Salt Lake. The game is between you and I, Richard Redhilt, ah! and Injun Nick! I looked everything in the face when I started out, and I will not go back. Then, I have found the girl, Bertha, who got vengeance in her head, and started out on a trail of her own. My duty is to take her back to her own, and to turn the man who orphaned her over to the authorities of New York. I will do both!"

An hour later Captain Coldgrip was back at his starting-place, and the darkness of the round cave was before him.

He listened for Bertha, but heard her not. Her lamp, if it was burning, sent no light into the circular cavern.

The detective was about to lower himself from the tunnel, when a slight noise reached his ears.

He could not compare it with anything he had ever heard before, and he listened with intense curiosity.

"Ah! I have it now. The rope has come back to its place, and somebody is coming down. If it is you, Richard Redhilt, I ask nothing better."

Claude Coldgrip, in his eagerness, pushed his body beyond the rim of the opening and held his breath.

He could not be mistaken now. Somebody was coming down the rounded wall by means of the rope which had facilitated his own descent, and he had a right to suppose that the Broadway Centipede had come back for a purpose of some kind.

The descent did not last long from the time the detective first heard it.

A certain noise indicated that the rope athlete whoever he was, had reached the floor of the cavern.

Again Captain Coldgrip began to lower himself, but a thought of the advantage held by the man beneath caused him to hesitate.

It was dangerous and folly, too, to go down to an enemy in the dark.

Bertha, the stake of the game, had probably fallen asleep in the chamber beyond, and knew nothing of the person who had come almost silently.

The detective noiselessly drew off his boots.

"I am going down," he said, resolutely. "Be that my Richard Redhilt or Injun Nick, he shall not lay his hand on the girl."

If the couch had not been dragged back into the other chamber by Bertha, the detective knew he would have to fall about ten feet. The couch would break his descent and would let him land with but little noise on the floor of the round cave.

He lowered himself for the third time and with lips compressed with resolution hung for half a minute along the dark wall.

"Here goes, life or death!" he ejaculated, and then he shot down at a mad venture, one of the maddest of his life.

The couch was where he had left it, and, as he had hoped, it broke his fall, enabling him to spring to his feet a second after striking.

Captain Coldgrip kept his presence of mind in an admirable manner.

After striking, he turned toward the center of the cave and drew a weapon for the unseen enemy.

What had become of the person who had come down the rope?

The New York detective wished for the owl's eyes at that thrilling moment. He dared not move, for the least stir might throw him into the arms of the unknown foe.

"A game in the dark," he said. "I don't like games of this sort, but I am here to play any one that comes to hand. If the enemy will only locate himself he will greatly oblige Claude Coldgrip of Gotham."

But the perplexing silence continued, and at last, with his blood worked to boiling heat, yet inwardly cool, the detective left the couch.

The next moment he found the location of the natural entrance into Bertha's room, for a light was burning beyond it.

"The girl is awake and has lit her lamp," he ejaculated. "Now if she comes into the round cavern she will throw light on a funny tableau."

It was evident that Bertha's room had been illumined by the rays of a lamp, and the detective saw the light strengthen while he watched.

The girl was coming into the circular cave.

Claude Coldgrip transferred his bowie to his left hand and drew a silent revolver.

He knew that within two minutes he would stand face to face with some foe. The girl was unconsciously revealing both.

In less than a minute the figure of Bertha appeared in the stone doorway, and the lamplight was streaming about her.

She stepped forward into the round room, and came toward the wall where Captain Coldgrip stood.

All at once the girl stopped and then drew back with a startling cry.

She had seen a person whose presence was totally unexpected, a stalwart man with a dark face and a pair of blazing eyeballs.

He stood near a portion of the wall and almost within arm's length of Captain Goldgrip, and in his right hand was a bowie of good length of blade. It glittered like his eyes.

"Injun Nick!" cried Bertha going back.

"My God! what brings you here again?"

She seemed about to drop the lamp and fly to the darkness that filled the room she had just left.

"Hold the lamp where it is!" suddenly rung out the detective's voice, and his revolver covered the Indian who recoiled with grated teeth.

The girl stood still.

"Hands up!" continued Captain Coldgrip. "I see now that you have more lives than a cat, Injun Nick. Get out from the wall and face me

like a man. Ah! the rope hangs in its old place, I see. You had to come back, eh?"

"Yes," said the Centipede's Indian pard. "I came here to meet and fight you, Captain Coldgrip. I told Richard that I would come and play the game out in one way or the other and he said I had better not. I suppose I am to be shot down like a man shoots a crippled wolf. By the living heavens! I came to fight you fair!"

All the time Captain Coldgrip kept the Indian covered with his six-shooter.

"I can't shoot a prisoner dead," he said to himself. "Though this man is really more dangerous than Richard Redhilt, I can't kill him where he stands. I am his equal physically. More than once, after the circus, I have good-naturedly tested his powers. I wonder how he wants to fight?"

Then he spoke over the leveled revolver to the cool red-skin.

"How shall we fight?" he asked.

"Ah! you will then?" exclaimed Injun Nick. "I am willing that but two persons shall go from this place—the girl yonder and a man. I came here for her."

"To take me away?" exclaimed Bertha almost springing forward and watching the Indian narrowly.

"Yes."

"Is it Richard Redhilt's command?"

"Never mind why I came," said Injun Nick. "After the duel, if Captain Coldgrip will fight, you may know. I will fight with the knife if he is not afraid."

The last word was emphasized in a manner that roused the detective.

"It shall be with the knife," he said, through his teeth, and then, suiting action to his words, he threw the revolver on the cot near by and transferred his bowie back to his right hand.

Injun Nick straightened himself at these preparations for a combat.

"Place the lamp on the ground, Bertha, and leave us here," said the detective, glancing toward the spellbound girl.

She looked at the two men and hesitated.

Her fortunes were to be decided with the bowie, and her champion was going to risk all in a hand-to-hand duel with the red Hercules of the Madison Square Circus.

"Put the lamp down and go, Bertha," repeated the detective.

The last command was reluctantly obeyed.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BATTLE OF THE GIANTS.

BERTHA BETHOL went back to the shadows of the chamber she had lately left, and halted among them with a brain that seemed on fire.

She saw even then, with a wall before her, the two men who stood face to face in the round cavern with their magnificent figures but indistinctly revealed by the lamp on the ground.

Then clasping her hands she awaited the issue of the underground duello.

The lamp on the solid stone floor of the save stood almost directly between Captain Coldgrip and Injun Nick.

Its rays threw their shadows on the gray wall at their backs; it also showed their flashing eyes to each other.

Not more than ten feet separated them.

The brawny figure of the coppery pard was well shown by the close-fitting shirt and pantaloons he wore, and these told the detective that he had come to the cavern in trim for a fight.

"Captain," said the Indian, leaning forward, "you remember the grip between Alabaster and Gold Eye?"

"You can bet your life it has not been forgotten!" was the quick response.

"You've got a famous hand thar," continued Injun Nick, glancing at the hand that gripped the seven-inch bowie. "I thought it was ice when it clutched my windpipe that night while you shouted in my ear a demand for the dispatches. It was over the canyon wall then, horse an' all, captain, but Injun Nick is here to fight the same cold hand again."

"Why prolong this?" asked Captain Coldgrip. "We are here to fight."

"When I am ready," said the Indian, coolly, and with provoking accent. "I am going to kill you, Claude Coldgrip. The game begun in New York is to end here."

"That is what you say," the detective said, and if the Indian had watched carefully, he would have seen the foot of the speaker glide forward an inch.

All at once the red-skin shut his lips and seemed to collect his strength.

"It is coming," flashed through Coldgrip's brain. "This battle must decide everything."

The next instant Injun Nick sprung at his antagonist like a mad gladiator or a panther.

The two men met within three feet of the little lamp Bertha had left on the ground.

The waiting girl heard the meeting and uttered a startling cry.

"Heavens! they are together!" she said, and an unseen power seemed to force her to the doorway from which she saw two men writhing in the lamp-light.

Quick as a flash the duelists had struck at once—powerful blows, but not fatal ones.

Fast upon his blow Captain Coldgrip's left hand found the Indian's throat.

Once more the bloodless fingers were at his windpipe!

Injun Nick shook or rather tore the dread hand loose, but he could not throw his enemy off, nor could he use the knife which his right hand gripped.

Back and forth in front of the little lamp in danger of knocking it over, the enemies swayed in the terrible struggle for the mastery.

Bertha the girl was held spellbound in the natural doorway. Her face was paleness itself and her form quivered.

Suddenly Captain Coldgrip dropped his bowie.

"My hands are better than steel in a fight of this kind," he said and Injun Nick soon found two naked hands pitted against him.

The girl could not suppress a cry at the detectives sudden change of tactics. She had seen the bowie fall to the ground, and thought that Injun Nick had forced it from the captain's hands. But she was soon undeceived, for all at once the sleuth-hound from New York charged the Indian and forced him almost to the cavern wall.

Captain Coldgrip's cold hand was once more at the red-skin's throat—this time to retain its hold.

The detective was seen to shut his lips as he concentrated his strength in that famous grip of his.

The Indian struggled, but in vain.

"There's not another hand like mine in all Christendom!" laughed the detective fiercely, and Bertha saw the Indian's bowie drop from his clutch and the man-hunter force him against the wall where hung the rope by which he had descended to the cavern.

Injun Nick was still conscious but his struggles had almost ceased.

He seemed to feel that the grip at his throat would not relax until death had declared a victory for Captain Coldgrip. His eyes were starting from his head, and Bertha who had sprung forward, recoiled from the horrible sight.

Captain Coldgrip appeared to forget the girl. He did not see that she had picked up the lamp and was holding it above her head as she looked breathless upon the battle now nearly at an end.

He saw only the man before him—Injun Nick the demoniac pard of the Broadway Centipede. For several minutes the bloodless hand did its work unmolested.

Bertha almost shrieked at the terrible changes of countenance visible in the man in the detective's grip.

"The man is dead," she said to Captain Coldgrip laying her hand on his arm. "He is dead and you are wounded."

Her words seemed to recall her presence to the New Yorker: he turned with his victorious eyes and then loosened his grip. Injun Nick fell at the foot of the wall showing plainly that the bloodless hand had done its work.

"Am I wounded, my little girl?" said the detective glancing from Bertha at himself. "I recollect: the red assassin did strike twice, but I felt no pain."

"Your sleeve is cut," said Bertha.

"Better a sleeve than a heart," laughed Captain Coldgrip. "The Indian's work is here in this arm. I feel the pain now. Let me see."

It was his left arm and he rolled the sleeve up while the girl held the light.

All at once Bertha uttered an exclamation of horror, but the detective merely smiled.

"By my life! the knife has gone clear through!" he said. "If this is all the wound I have, Bertha, the battle was very successfully fought."

He took the lamp from the girl's hand and held it over the man lying at the bottom of the round wall.

"Dead? Is Injun Nick dead?" asked the young girl eagerly.

"The red dog is dead!" said the captain.

Injun Nick did not look much like the bespangled Hercules who several years before had received the applause of admiring thousands in Madison Square Garden.

Captain Coldgrip could not help thinking of his triumphs while he looked at him on the ground before him.

"It is death to become your friend, Richard Redhilt," he murmured. "Mormon Luke and Diamond Dan found your friendship fatal; so has this man, perhaps the bravest of them all. My cold hand failed on you the first time, Injun Nick, but to-night its clutch was fatal."

At that moment Bertha uttered a cry that caused the detective to spring erect.

"Look!" she said, catching his arm while her other hand pointed upward. "A man is coming down the rope!"

Captain Coldgrip saw the cause for alarm almost before the startled girl had ceased.

The light of the lamp was not thrown far overhead, but far enough to show the New York sleuth a human figure coming down the rope rapidly and without a sound.

A bound carried the detective to the dangling cord.

"Come on!" he called out to the person on the rope. "The Indian is here, with his game played through, Richard. Come down and look at your pard."

Was the person on the rope the Broadway Centipede?

He had stopped, and was looking down at Bertha and the detective.

"Let him come!" suddenly cried the girl. "It is Silver Silas, the only friend I made in Gold Eye."

"And the man for whom Santa Fe Sam fixed the loop the night Richard's mob pulled him up! Yes, come down, Silver Silas. Your reception here will be better than Richard's."

The youth on the rope laughed, and began to descend once more.

"You will have a friend here when I go back to take the last man," said the detective with a look at the girl.

The next moment the person on the rope touched the ground, but not a second too soon, for the rope itself came down like a huge serpent, and with it a piece of iron that sent out a metallic ring when it struck the stone.

"Never mind! we have the new corridor and the rope," said Captain Coldgrip, holding out his hand to the new-comer, who was a young man about twenty, well built and good looking.

"They pulled you up once, eh?" continued the detective.

"They did, indeed; but I found a friend where I expected only enemies. A fellow named Santa Fe Sam told me when he adjusted the rope that he would give me a chance, and he did."

"He tried the same game for Diamond Dan, but fate had a grudge against Diamond, and spoiled the trick," said the man-hunter. "I have paid Santa Fe Sam for his work. He is on his way to Denver with an order for two thousand."

"When I strike it rich, he'll get a check for a cool hundred thousand," smiled Silver Silas, and then his gaze fell upon the Indian at the foot of the wall.

"Ah! this is the last game for Injun Nick!" he exclaimed, and then he began to put his hand into the red-skin's bosom.

"If it's heart-beats you're feeling for, let me tell you that you'll find none," said the detective.

Silver Silas did not desist, but kept on until a sudden gleam announced that he had found something.

The next moment he was holding a small locket up to the gaze of a startled pair.

"I never knew he wore that!" exclaimed the detective.

"I did," was the reply. "This man has not always been a merciless Indian."

"No. He was once the Scarlet Hercules of the Madison Square Garden."

"He was more than that. This locket contains the secret of his life."

"Open it!" cried Bertha, eagerly.

"Not now," said Silver Silas.

"Let us wait till the last play of the game has been made. Richard Redhilt still remains. He is just now the most fascinated man in Colorado."

"What do you mean?" cried the detective.

"Camp Bonanza has just received a real Western Cleopatra, and the Centipede, as you call him, is in the toils."

"Who is the woman?"

"I don't know. I know that Injun Nick tried to prove her Durango Diaz's wife, but failed. The Mexican has left camp, but the woman remains. To-day she took possession of Richard Redhilt's cabin. She is here to play a game of some kind."

"What is she like?" asked the detective.

The young man gave an exact if not a glowing description of Ninez, the Mormon Queen. It excited Bertha's curiosity; her eyes brightened.

"I would like to see this woman!" she exclaimed.

"You don't want to see her now," said Captain Coldgrip, turning upon the girl and speaking with a sternness that startled her.

"Do you know her?" said Bertha.

"I will wait and see," was the perplexing reply. "You are certain you have never seen her, Silver Silas?"

The young miner shook his head.

"She is entirely strange to me," he said.

"Have you ever been to Salt Lake City?"

"Never."

The detective made no audible response.

"If this woman has come to Camp Bonanza the game may get a new lease of life," he said, under his breath. "If she met of Mormon Luke dying on the road, or found him dead, she may deal a blow that will deprive me Richard Redhilt. I saw enough of her in Salt Lake to know that she places no value on the life of a foe. Onyx Oll whom she daggered for the key to Richard's hiding-place, stamps her a tigress without mercy. I must see this woman. Her beauty and her dagger must not defeat me now."

He did not know that Ninez had come to Camp Bonanza for the life of the beautiful prize of the game—Bertha!

CHAPTER XXVI.

TWO WARNINGS.

"WHERE is Injun Nick? Has the fellow gone back to Gold Eye in a pet because I would not turn against the woman he calls Durango Diaz's wife and the queen of a Mormon harem? He hates women; I know that. I have seen his hatred take a thousand shapes almost since I've known him. He has been gone three days. If he has gone to Gold Eye, Little Lot will have something to report when he comes back."

Richard Redhilt sat alone in his little cabin in Camp Bonanza.

Myriads of stars were throwing their mellow light upon the camp and there were no indications of a coming storm.

Injun Nick had not come back from the battleground in the round cave; he had not reported his meeting with Captain Coldgrip, and the Broadway Centipede believed he had gone back to Gold Eye in a pet.

Suddenly something flying in at the open door landed on the table before him.

He sprang up, seeing first that the object was a piece of paper, and darted to the door. Nobody was in sight, and the camp was as still as if all its inmates slept.

Richard Redhilt went back and picked up the little packet. It was found to be a single sheet of paper when unfolded, and in the light of his lamp he read:

"RICHARD REDHILT:—Beware! Don't let the black eyes get the best of you. Injun Nick did not lie when he told you that Gunnison Jessie is Durango Diaz's wife. No law has ever divorced the pair. She dare not swear that she has not been a Mormon's pet within the last three months. Look out, Richard! The black-eyed rattlesnake came here to bite somebody."

A TRUE FRIEND.

"An infernal liar!" flashed the Centipede, crushing the paper and throwing it away.

"Here is a new game some man is playing. I will have no meddlers in this camp. Now that I have Captain Coldgrip in a cage from which there is no escape, I can play any new drama I please. There's a world of difference between these two women. One is hard to conquer, the other is my prize already. Gunnison Jessie the wife of Durango Diaz, the Mexican pard? I won't believe a word of it! The liar left camp the night she came. Can this be one of Injun Nick's plays?"

He got the message again and examined the handwriting closely.

It was not Injun Nick's.

"The anonymous scoundrel is in camp," he cried. "I am going to strike him right away."

Three minutes later Richard Redhilt opened the door of a certain cabin and surprised four men at a game of cards.

"The cap'n!" exclaimed the quartette in concert, and the game was suspended as if the gamblers saw that the Centipede had not sought them for naught.

These men he could trust; they had served him well ever since the institution of the sworn league at Gold Eye, and he could not have been made to believe that one of them was a traitor.

Richard made no reply, but walked forward and threw the message upon the table.

It was spread out by several eager hands, and the gamblers leaned forward.

"The deuce!" exclaimed one, looking up into Richard's face. "Do you believe this, cap'n?"

"No! but that is not what I want to know. Who wrote that infamous lie?"

Three of the men shook their heads, and Richard fixed his eyes on the fourth.

"What do you say, Kansas?" he asked.

"I don't like ter be too sartain—that is, I don't like ter accuse a man who might be innocent," was the reply.

"Then you've seen that 'hand' before?"

"I think I have."

Richard gave the man a look and left the cabin. In a moment he was on the outside, and the gambler tough touched his elbow.

"Who wrote that message?" asked the Centipede, eagerly.

"Durango Diaz."

"What! the Mexican himself?" exclaimed Richard. "He left camp the night she came, and besides, he always told me that he never learned to write."

"He told others that, too, but the man from Greaserland lied—that is all. I knew Durango Diaz when he was in his own country, and I know that he wrote letters, and plenty of them."

"What do you know about his wife?"

"Nothing."

Richard held out his hand with the message in it.

"Then you say he wrote that?" he said.

"I could almost swear ter it, captain."

"That is enough."

A short silence ensued.

"Well, what do you say now?" Kansas Kit asked, looking into Richard's face.

"I still denounce it as a lie!" flashed the Centipede. "I do not believe that the guest of Camp Bonanza ever allied herself to a wretch like Durango Diaz. She has a soul too lofty for that. If I catch this Mexican coyote I'll make him eat his paper. He has a grudge against

Gunnison Jessie. When Injun Nick dragged him into her presence, he declared she had never been his wife—was willing to swear to it. Now he sneaks back with a lie in black and white, hoping that I will take it in and turn her out—to him, I expect. I intended to tear this paper up, but I'll keep it to cram it down his throat! I want the camp searched privately, Kansas. If Durango Diaz is found, I want him brought to me."

The gambler went back to his pards and delivered the commands. The game was at once broken up, and the four men left the cabin.

Richard walked away with the flash of anger still in his eyes.

The hour was early, but the camp was quiet.

"I want to see what she says about this scheme," ejaculated the Centipede, approaching a cabin through whose window was seen a light. "Her eyes will flash when she reads the Greaser's lie. She is not Durango Diaz's wife. I would as soon believe her Satan's sister!"

The next minute his knuckles struck the door lightly, and a moment later he was looking into the bewitching eyes of Gunnison Jessie. She held the door open in a manner which was an invitation to enter, and Richard Redhilt soon stood in her presence.

"I've just discovered a serpent," began the Broadway Centipede. "I am sorry to say he has been trying to bite you."

"Me?" cried the woman. "Have you rattlesnakes in Camp Bonanza, Captain Redhilt?"

"Only one, and he is likely to appear before me for sentence before morning. He is stinging you with the same old lie, Jessie—the infamous accusation that makes my blood boil. Look at this."

Richard Redhilt completed his speech by handing the beautiful woman the Mexican's message, and from the moment of her taking it he watched her closely.

A slight flush came to the cheeks of the woman from the North, and her eyes seemed to take on a new gleam.

"That means something," muttered Richard.

"Ah! I knew the lie would stir her blood."

"Who wrote this?" she suddenly cried, looking up.

"Durango Diaz."

"Ah, yes, the man Injun Nick brought to me the other night," she went on. "Why, he denied the whole story in my presence."

"I know he did—the scoundrel!" hissed Richard. "See! he tries to stab you in the dark. He sneaks back into camp and throws his black and white lie upon my table. And he adds the other lie, too—that you are now a Mormon's wife. You need not think that I intend to believe such stuff, Jessie."

"I thank you," said the woman. "I only wish I could confront this slanderer in your presence, captain. Me his wife? Ha! ha! The man must be mad!"

"Not mad, maybe, but with a devil's game in his head," said Richard. "His lie is too transparent to effect anything. It is the last move he will make, for I have a pack of sleuth-hounds after him. He is the one man I admitted to my league without an oath. He had scruples about swearing, he said, and I let him in without it."

Ninez smiled.

"I had a singular dream during a brief sleep this afternoon," she said.

"What was it?"

"I am ashamed to tell it," she replied. "I know that nothing like it ever happened here, and yet I saw your face and Injun Nick's, too. I dreamed that a man was shot on the mountain and carried to your cabin, where he found Injun Nick and yourself—that by and by a handsome man with a black beard came and took him away at the revolver's muzzle. I seemed to follow the wounded man and his friend from camp, and, as I seemed to be near, I heard the rescuer call him Luke. Wasn't that a strange dream, captain? What do you think put it in my head?"

"Heaven knows," said Richard Redhilt, without heeding the first question, and while his mind went back to the stern reality of "the dream."

He did not know that a few moments after the warning letter reached his table a short letter in the same handwriting fluttered into Ninez's cabin, and that the beauty read as follows:

"MY VIPER WIFE:—I am going away forever. God knows I did not expect to meet you here. Before you ensnare Richard Redhilt you had better ask him who was shot a few nights ago on the mountain by his orders. You may want to know, if you don't already, that Mormon Luke got his death wound by being mistaken for Diamond Dan, that he was carried to Richard's cabin, and that Captain Coldgrip took him from under Injun Nick's clutches with the dropper, and escorted him from camp. I swear this by the hearts of the saints. I hate you because you beggared me in Mexico six months after our marriage. I have just warned Richard Redhilt, but you need not fear—he will not believe. Play your game out, Ninez. I don't know what brought you from Salt Lake, but I believe you followed Mormon Luke. If we never meet again, and I hope we never will, may some man beat you at one of your own games."

DURANGO.

It was this letter that formed the substance for the dream related by the Mormon's wife to Richard Redhilt.

She watched him eagerly and closely.

"Such scenes never took place here, did they?" she suddenly asked.

Before the Broadway Centipede could reply, a man appeared at the door, and his announcement startled the occupants of the cabin.

"We didn't hev ter hunt long, cap'n," he said.

"We've diskivered Durango."

"Found the Greaser liar?" exclaimed the Centipede, darting forward. "Where is he?"

"In Poker Perry's shanty."

"Dead?"

"Mighty nigh it."

Richard turned to the Utah siren.

"You've heard? Somebody has nearly finished Durango Diaz. If there is ten minutes of life in him, we will send him to eternity by the lasso route!"

He started toward the door, and found Ninez at his side when he had left the cabin.

"I want to see this man again," she said, in a strange and eager voice. "I will go with you to Durango Diaz."

Richard offered no remonstrance, and the two hurried away together.

A few steps brought them to Poker Perry's shanty, and their eyes fell upon a man lying on a blanket in the middle of the floor.

"Thar's a dagger-wound in ther left breast, cap'n," said Kansas Kit in a low voice to Richard. "We found 'im just outside ther camp, an' he's only opened his eyes once since we fetched 'im hyar."

Nobody saw Ninez's eyes glitter at these words. She watched Richard Redhilt bend over the prostrate man, and saw him shake him gently.

For a moment there was no sign of life in Durango Diaz; then his eyes began to unclose, and when wide open, they became fixed on the Mormon queen.

All at once his arm commenced to rise, and his hand at last covered her.

"She did it—the Cuban viper!" he said, startlingly. "I swear before God that she is my wife, and that she gave me the dagger to-night!"

Then Durango Diaz was dead!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE COLD HAND AGAIN.

THE crowd looked at the woman thus accused. She did not turn pale, nor recoil from the staring eyes of the dead.

"Is this true?" suddenly demanded Richard Redhilt. "You heard what Durango said. He went to his God, calling you—"

"His murderess, eh?" smiled Ninez. "Yes, I heard the man, but do I look like one?"

And she drew her queenly form up and looked straight at the boss of Camp Bonanza.

Richard, it was plainly seen, was dumfounded.

In the first place, he had never liked Durango Diaz, but he could not think that a man would die with such a lie on his lips.

Gunnison Jessie a murderess?

She did not look like one as she stood proudly before the breathless crowd and waited for the verdict.

"I can't believe it," said the Broadway Centipede. "Boys, let us think that Durango was out of his head when death got him. This lady can't be a murderess—going about daggering men in this fashion. I don't believe it!" he said to the enchantress direct.

The faintest smile appeared at the corners of her finely chiseled lips.

"If there is any doubt, gentlemen, I can be tried," she said, looking at the crowd again. "This man has called me his wife just as if I had stooped to a union with him. Let that charge be proven first. If I was his wife I might have cause for killing him."

There was no answer, but the crowd seemed to grow uneasy.

"You can go back now," Richard said to her. "If Camp Bonanza is not satisfied you will know it. As for Richard Redhilt, he is fully convinced that the blood of Durango Diaz is not on your soul."

Ninez looked grateful at the speaker, and turned away.

"I have the camp king on my side," she murmured triumphantly between the cabin and her own quarters. "I don't believe Richard Redhilt would believe me guilty if he had seen me deal the blow. The Mexican Crotalus lived long enough to down me—in his mind. I thought the knife had finished him, but he lived long enough to accuse me. Onyx Oil did not do as well. Now, Richard, I will show you a dandy hand within twenty-four hours. I must have time to lay the ropes. My dream was not all a dream after all. If Mormon Luke died after he left Captain Coldgrip the Utah widow will make things lively among the men who shed his blood!"

She went back to her cabin and shut the door.

"What brought me here? Ah, yes, I know now!" she exclaimed. "I came to find the girl who has infatuated Mormon Luke. He left Salt Lake City to find her, but Richard Redhilt's pards got him. She is here still, but I want another life first. If Mormon Luke is dead, why need I hurry to unearth this young girl who is

at once the Centipede's prize and prisoner? Richard Redhilt, I will play against you, and it shall from this hour be a race between Ninez the Mormon and Captain Coldgrip."

"A race for what, madame?"

The door opened as the question was asked, and with a cry that drove her to the wall of the cabin, Ninez, the siren, saw the New York spotter standing erect in the lamp-light.

He was no longer dressed as the man from Tinaja; the black beard which had been a mask had disappeared, but the dark eyes were still alive and she knew that she faced the tireless foe of the Gotham league.

"Didn't you hear me?" asked Captain Coldgrip, striding forward and smiling coolly. "If we are to run for a prize, name it. Oh, my Utah Medicis, what will be your next play? Why don't you follow the man I set toward home several nights ago?"

She looked into the handsome speaker's face, but did not speak.

"I knew you had come to camp," the detective went on. "Let me show you a man who is keeping dead guard under the stars just beyond the lost cabin."

"No!" cried Ninez. "You are Captain Coldgrip. I believe we have never met before, but I know you just the same. You have hanged Diamond Dan, and Mormon Luke, I am told, rode toward Utah with a death wound. The only man left of the three is Richard Redhilt."

"The only one, providing your husband is dead," said the detective.

"Do you think there is a chance for him?" asked Ninez, catching at Captain Coldgrip's last sentence.

"One in a thousand," was the reply. "Don't you think you had better follow?"

"To save him for you?" she asked, meeting the detective's smile with a look of hatred. "I know the oath you took in New York over the dead with a little girl in your arms. Mormon Luke was included in that vow of vengeance, though he did not commit the great crime. Now, you want me to follow him—to get him home, if possible, to nurse him back to health that you may step forward sometime and finish the game. I will do nothing of the kind!"

Her eyes took a new flash as she made the determined announcement.

"Very well," laughed the detective. "If you want me to play against you, Ninez, I shall not hesitate."

"When will you begin?"

"Now, if you wish."

The Mormon siren saw the magnificent figure of Captain Coldgrip between her and the door.

He had come in coolly and without noise, and faced her with the ease of a man who is confident of his resources.

"There is no use disguising my play from you," she suddenly said, stepping forward until the detective could look into the depths of her eyes. "I have this Richard Redhilt in my meshes. By his orders Mormon Luke was shot on the mountain. I did not know this until to-night. It makes my blood leap through my veins. Give him to me, captain."

Captain Coldgrip showed his astonishment.

"Do you mean that?" he asked.

"Every word of it!" exclaimed the woman.

"I want the life of the man who shed my Mormon husband's blood."

"Did you love Mormon Luke?"

"He was my husband anyhow."

"Oh! I see," said the detective. "Between the two husbands, you probably thought more of Durango Diaz, the first one."

"I hated him from the moment I became his wife! I liked Mormon Luke better. I wanted no girl between us. I came here to prevent the natural results of his last infatuation; but I will let that part of the game go, if you will give this man to me."

"Which means that if I will give Richard Redhilt over to your vengeance, you will not attempt to find Bertha?"

"That is it!" cried Ninez. "Give this man to me!"

"When I am through with him," said the detective coolly.

The woman drew back like a snake about to strike.

"Then look out!" she cried. "I give you fair warning, Captain Coldgrip. I will meet and finish this New York thug before morning, if I can! Three hours ago I had plotted an entirely different play. I did not know then that, through him, Mormon Luke rode dying from Camp Bonanza. Your oath to take Richard Redhilt back to New York may never be fulfilled."

"Hand to hand and steel to steel, eh?" cried the detective.

"It is nothing less."

"Then go ahead and throw your cards!" Captain Coldgrip said. "I have seen you in the gilded cage built for you in Salt Lake City. I might have molested you there, but I did not."

A strange look came into Ninez's eyes; her face flushed, and she started violently.

"You think you know something," she said, assuming a boldness which she did not naturally possess.

"I do."

"You detectives think you know everybody's faults," she went on.

"We know a good many people's crimes," smiled Captain Coldgrip.

"You know none on me. Your words would convey a threat that has no foundation. You can't drive me from the game by these means, captain."

"I don't seek to—not even when I tell you that I have seen one Portez—"

"For God's sake, seal your lips!" cried the Utah siren, all color suddenly deserting her face.

"Ah! I thought I had one good arrow among the dozen!" laughed the detective.

Ninez seemed to have been transformed into a statue of stone. Captain Coldgrip could not see that the woman breathed.

"You will be quiet now," he went on, and his hand closed on her wrist before she could draw back. "Come, Ninez, let me show you the trail which a woman like you should take."

She offered no resistance, as if the last blow had utterly crushed her.

The detective led her from the cabin and down the still and seemingly-deserted camp.

Cabin after cabin was left behind; not a word was spoken.

"You know where your horse is," the detective said, at last, addressing the silent and thoughtful woman. "You have been here several days. You will leave Camp Bonanza to-night. I don't want you here."

"No! you don't want me to interfere in the game going on," Ninez answered.

"That is the case exactly. I am going to play the last 'hand' within twenty-four hours."

"If I go," said the glittering-eyed woman.

"Or if you stay—it matters not which!"

Captain Coldgrip released the Mormon siren's wrist as he closed the sentence. He drew back a step and looked at her.

There was the beauty of the leopardess about this woman from the City of the Saints. She was near enough in the full starlight to show the New York spotter that there were not many women like her. If ever an enchantress lived she stood before the man from the East.

"I don't care where you go," said Coldgrip.

"It seems to me that duty would lead you over the trail on which I set Mormon Luke some nights ago. I don't think you will go to Santa Fe."

"I would go to perdition first, and you know it!" was the response. "I am almost ready to believe that you detectives know everything. No! I shall not go to Santa Fe, and you cannot drive me to Mormon Luke's trail. Captain Coldgrip, since you know that I am Portez the accused prisoner of Santa Fe, what have I to live for?"

"I am not on your trail, Ninez," said the detective. "I made the terrible discovery accidentally. If you go back to Salt Lake you can take possession of the Mormon cage there, and I will not invade it to make you fear. I ask but this: that you go now and let me play this game out."

She looked at him strangely, as if she were trying to read his secret thoughts.

"I go on one condition," she said, clutching his arm and leaning forward. "If you don't make your play within six hours from this time I am to make mine. Is it a bargain?"

Captain Coldgrip gazed into the woman's face and smiled.

"I agree," he said.

She uttered an exclamation of triumph and drew back.

"Now go to Camp Bonanza and strike!" she said, pointing toward the group of cabins almost visible in the starlight. "Six hours' grace is all you have, Captain Coldgrip. It will still be night when the time ends. Yonder is Richard Redhilt—the man hunted by you like a bloodhound for more than two years. He belongs to me after six hours if I can reach him. Remember! They named me rightly in Santa Fe—Portez the Pitiless!"

In another moment Captain Coldgrip was going back to camp.

"Six hours?" he murmured, "I don't want three!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A BOTTLE OF MADEIRA.

THERE was no regular saloon in Camp Bonanza, but there was a certain cabin a little larger than its neighbors where Richard Redhilt's league could wet their throats with several brands of average whisky.

This cabin stood near the center of the group that formed the camp and its stores were presided over by a tall fellow known as Shingle Sim, one of the last men to attach himself to Richard.

It was shortly after the interview between Captain Coldgrip and Ninez when Shingle Sim who happened to be alone had a visitor for whom he was not looking.

The lank keeper of the liquid treasures of Camp Bonanza started when he saw the Mormon Queen enter his establishment and close the door carefully behind her.

"She's ther first angel thet ever invaded this saints' rest," muttered Shingle Sim as Ninez

came forward. "She's ther seraph what dropped down onto Bonanza ther other day—ther one thet's fascinated Cap'n Richard an' I don't wonder—such eyes!"

Shingle Sim who had been leaning on the little counter in one corner of the room put on his best face and received Ninez with a bow that was supremely ridiculous.

"Pardon my awkwardness, I warn't fetched up at court an' you're ther first princess thet ever alighted in this Garden ov Eden. I am Simon Shingleton—Shingle Sim ov Camp Bonanza, for ther present. What's yer favorite nectar?"

Shingle Sim took it for granted that Ninez had come to sample the contents of the little bottles under the counter for where he had passed the last few years of his life he had seen many a drink taken by the most beautiful of the fair sex.

Ninez smiled until her eyes glistened anew over the question.

"You don't keep my favorite here," she said.

"What's thet?"

"Madeira."

"Just one bottle left," said Shingle Sim, diving under the counter before Ninez could remonstrate. "We keep ther best thet money kin procure, an' if we hav'n't got Madeary, I'll go bail for a million!"

He rattled among the hidden bottles for awhile, and then bobbed up with triumph in his eye.

"Thar she is!" he ejaculated, placing one before the woman. "Ther man thet fetched our last consignment ter camp, war what you'd call a connisoor ov liquors. They say he's dead now—do you know?"

"Who was he?"

"Durango Diaz," and at the name, Ninez started slightly. "Pacific Paul war hyer awhile ago, an' said thet he war found daggered just outside o' camp. He's ther connisoor I've mentioned—knew liquors better than he knew himself, an' when Cap'n Richard sent 'im for a supply, he told him to get ther best. Thet's Madeary. Durango said so, an' he knew."

Ninez allowed Shingle Sim to break the neck of the bottle, and then she poured some of its contents into the glass before her.

Her eyes sparkled like the wine. She was wondering if it was the same wine she used to drink in Cuba, before she met Durango Diaz and afterward Mormon Luke.

"When Durango came back with his last lot," continued Shingle Sim, "he told me that that Madeary belonged to ther cellars ov a rich Cuban, who died a few years ago. Somewhar on ther bottle is his private mark, but I could never find it."

A strange spell seemed to take possession of Ninez. The glass which she had raised half way to her lips she set down rather suddenly and took her hands away.

"He told you that, did he?" she asked looking into Shingle Sam's face.

"Yes. He got the wines ov El Morro, a Spanish dealer in Santa Fe, an' a feller who picks up bargains in drinks wherever he kin find 'em."

"Did Durango Diaz tell you from whose cellars this wine came?"

"He did but I've forgotten. Would yer like to know?"

"I would."

Shingle Sim leaned his elbows on the counter and buried his angular face in his long bronze hands.

Ninez watched him closely. "It war—hang it all! I git ther name on my tongue an' then it slips off!" ejaculated the liquor dealer.

"Was it—"

The woman stopped as if the rest of the question had stuck in her throat.

"No I don't think thet war it," said Shingle Sim with a grin. "I'll get at it in a minute. By glory! I've corraled it now. Ther name war Estevan!"

Ninez started but not violently; her lips closed firmly together, and her eyes got a wild light.

In an instant her fingers closed on the glass again.

"Estevan's wine, is it?" she exclaimed, and the next moment she was drinking it almost furiously.

"Fill it again!" she said to the astonished liquor guard as she pushed the glass toward him. "I like it. It makes me think of the past. What is the bottle worth? Why haven't you a dozen instead of one?"

Shingle Sim filled the big glass almost to the brim as if the woman's beauty had made him liberal hearted.

"Durango couldn't get all he wanted ov it," he said. "This is ther last bottle hyer. It doesn't cost you a cent. Cap'n Richard came hyer t'other night an' took two bottles up ter his shanty."

"Ah! did he?" exclaimed Ninez whose eyes were now snapping under the influence of the wine.

"Two bottles," repeated Shingle Sim.

The Mormon Cleopatra made no reply.

She was holding the third glass between her glowing eyes and the lamp behind the counter. "You're an old friend!" she laughed address-

ing the wine. "Many's the time I've gone to the cellars and enjoyed you. This isn't Cuba, but I find you here. You have kept track of me all the same and I enjoy you again. Estevan! Ha! I have not forgotten that name, though I haven't heard it spoken by living lips for months. What did you say about Don Estevan, Shingle Sim. Dead, eh?"

"That's the story Durango told when he came home with the Madeary," was the reply. "It war nothin' ter me, ov course, whether he war dead or alive, so ther wine came all right an' made ther pards smack their lips over some-thin' good. I b'lieve Durango did say thet Don Estevan, as you call him, went crazy first about a daughter—"

"Stop!" thundered Ninez, recoiling with a force suddenly grown white. "What lie is this you're going to retail to me?"

"I war only tellin' what I now remember thet Durango said—"

She broke Shingle Sim's sentence by springing to the counter, and her hand darting forward like a rattlesnake, suddenly encircled his wrist.

"Tell me all you know. I want to hear all about him!" she cried.

"About who?"

"Don Estevan! What did Durango say?"

"Almighty little thet interested me," said Shingle Sim. "It war by ther merest chance, I s'pose, thet El Morro, the old liquor sharp ov Santa Fe, told 'im anything about this Cuban. Durango only said it war a long story about a rich Don thet had one child, a daughter, what fell in love with a Spanish officer an' ran away with him. She arterwards turned up in Mexico as ther wife ov a feller who looked like somebody, but who war nothin' but a muleteer, or su'thin' ov ther sort."

"Is that all?"

"Thet's about ther lay-out as I got it from Durango when he came back," said Shingle Sim. "Arter his child ran away, ther old gov'ner lost his mind, sold all his mines, an' war found dead one morning."

"Suicide?" asked Ninez in a voice quite unlike her own.

"Durango didn't say, but thet's what I gathered from the way he put ther case."

The Mormon queen was silent.

"I wonder if she knows anything about it," murmured Shingle Sim. "She doesn't look like ther woman who came in hyer a little while ago. Ther wine's gone ter her head. By Jupiter! my seraph ar' drunk!"

The liquor guard reached forward and took the bottle, but Ninez with a sudden cry snatched it away.

"It is all mine! You gave it to me!" she cried fiercely. "It is like drinking blood, and that is what I want just now!"

She tipped the bottle, but only a few red drops fell into the glass.

"Is that all?" she said, bitterly disappointed.

"It's every drop an' thar's no more in the shanty," said Shingle Sim.

"But you said that Richard Redhilt took two bottles away?"

"Thet war several nights ago, but you wouldn't find any ov it left ef you called on 'im. You had better go to yer cabin an' sleep off what you've taken. Arter a while ther boys may take a notion ter come hyer—"

At that moment the door opened and Ninez and Shingle Sim stood face to face with several men who had heard Durango Diaz accuse the Mormoness of being his slayer.

"They're hyer now," continued Shingle Sim, lowering his voice to a whisper. "Go out quickly an' let 'em drink alone."

Ninez drew back from the counter and saw the men advance.

All at once one turned upon her and took a step forward.

"How about what Durango Diaz said?" he said, looking the Mormoness in the face.

"The man lied!" she flashed, straightening despite the wine she had drank.

"Thar may be some people who don't think so," was the reply. "Shut the door thar, Monte. We've not got ther captain hyer ter help this woman out, and by Heaven we'll know somethin' about Durango's death before we ar' through with her!"

Ninez stood in the middle of the room and with the lamplight around her.

"This is no court," she said, fearlessly to her confronter. "I have told you that Durango lied with his last breath. Why should I kill a man like him?"

"He accused you ov bein' his wife," said the stalwart pard. "A man don't die with a lie like thet on his lips; at least I've never seen one do it, an' many 's the one thet's shuffled off ther mortal coil afore Rincon Rob."

The speaker took another quick stride toward Ninez. The door had been shut by a man called Monte, and there were indications of an exciting scene.

"Thet woman is off her base, Rincon," called out Shingle Sim. "She finished ther last bottle ov Madeary afore I thought she war half-way down. Look at her eyes! Don't touch 'er! let 'er go. Ter be plain, she's drunk!"

The camp pards burst into a loud laugh.

"She's sober enough ter answer ther charge

ov murder," grinned Rincon Rob. "I'll bet my head thet she's no more Gunnison Jessie than I am Queen ov Madagasker. How's that, my black-eyed seraph?"

Ninez threw up her hand and pushed the bronzed sport back.

"You don't know who I am!" she cried. "Stand off, Rincon Rob, and listen: I am the lost daughter of Don Estevan whose wine I have just finished."

Shingle Sim uttered a loud exclamation.

"Ef she ain't cl'ar off her base now, I'm a sea boss!" he cried. "I war tellin' her about Don Estevan's runaway child an' ther wine's fastened ther tale in her mind."

"Think so if you want to, but I am Isa Estevan," said Ninez, to the liquor-dealer. "I went to Mexico with the Spanish officer who lured me from home, he deserted me there, and made me what I am now, an adventuress."

"You war Durango's wife, then?" asked Rincon Rob, eagerly.

"That will be proven or disproven to-morrow," was the reply.

"Why, then?"

"Because it is my wish," said Ninez. "If you men will give me rest to-night, I will settle the question of Durango Diaz's death to-morrow. What do you say?"

Rincon Rob looked at his companions.

"Give her time," said Shingle Sim. "She can't get away, drunk as she is. It's only a few hours anyhow."

"We give you till to-morrow," said the big pard. "You can go back to the cabin. Durango had no special friends hyer, but, by Jupiter! he war one ov us, an' we're in duty bound ter find ther person who helped 'im out o' ther world."

Ninez looked at the group for a moment, and then went to the door.

Her step was not unsteady; she laid her hand on the wooden latch and looked over her shoulder at the pards.

"To-morrow, gentlemen," she said, and was gone.

"I thought you said thet woman war drunk," said Rincon Rob, turning to Shingle Sim.

"I did. She's got a whole bottle ov thet Cuban wine in her head."

"An' blood in her eye," was the retort. "A thousand to one she killed Durango Diaz, her husband, an' if she shows up to-morrow, she shall be tried even if Captain Richard stands by her innocence!"

"We'll see about that, Rincon Rob," said a voice on the outside of the cabin, and Ninez walked away.

"Let me see. I told Captain Coldgrip that I would give him six hours of grace. After they expire, Richard Redhilt belongs to Mormon Luke's wife. *Sacrista!* who thought I would taste the Estevan wine in this mountain camp? My father is dead—died because I ran off and left him alone. If it had not been for Durango Diaz I might have gone back, and now I am to be tried for killing that wretch. I did love Mormon Luke. He gave me a home, at least. There are two bottles of the old wine left. They are with Richard Redhilt. I want them. I am Don Estevan's heiress!"

Five minutes later, Ninez burst into a certain cabin and surprised a handsome man at a table.

A bottle of wine was before him.

Ninez clutched it with a joyful cry.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE CONFESSION.

RICHARD REDHILT, surprised at the woman's sudden appearance and her audacity, almost tumbled from his stool.

"This belongs to me!" she exclaimed, clutching the bottle. "I expect it is the last of my fortune. See! I pour out the blood-wine and drink your health, captain!"

She stepped back and filled the glass with the wine; then held it above her head, and laughed wildly.

"Is the witch mad?" muttered the Broadway Centipede. "She doesn't act like a sane person. That wine the last of her fortune? I'd like to know how that is."

He sprang up as Ninez emptied the glass, and clutched her arm.

"When did you lose your head, Jessie?" he ejaculated.

"Jessie? I am Isa Estevan—the child of the man who first owned this wine."

"You?"

"I'm nobody else, Richard Redhilt!"

"Then the Gunnison Jessie game is all humbug, eh?"

"It was a name I added to suit the occasion. There is another bottle like this one. Come! where is it?"

The woman's eyes flashed madly.

"In the first place, what put you on this play?" asked the Centipede. "This isn't the first wine you've had to-night. I can tell that by the snap of your eyes."

"No; I emptied the one bottle Shingle Sim had in his possession. He told me you had two here. Where is the other?"

"It is empty, in my cabin."

"This is the last one, then?"

"The last one," echoed Richard. "But I want to know about this change of name," he went on. "You came here Gunnison Jessie, but now you proclaim yourself Isa Estevan. Go a little further, and I will believe you Durango Diaz's wife."

The sport laughed in a manner which told her that his last sentence, was merely banter. He was still under the spell of Ninez's wonderful eyes.

"What if I had been Durango's wife?" she said. "Would you turn me over to the camp for trial?"

"I would not like to."

"Which means that you dare not cross the pards? Ah! I know man pretty well, Richard; I have had experiences with him under three flags. I drink your health again."

This time Ninez did not get to carry out her intention, for Richard Redhilt caught the hand that held the glass, and the next moment he had torn the bottle of wine from her grasp and shattered it against the cabin wall.

The woman drew back with a look like a baffled serpent.

"You will never do that again," she said, through clinched teeth.

"Probably not," laughed Richard. "It is the last bottle."

Ninez drew her faultless figure up, and looked steadily at the handsome Centipede for several moments.

"I told him I'd wait six hours," she said to herself, but unconsciously speaking aloud.

"Told whom?" cried Richard Redhilt, quickly.

"With whom are you leagued, woman? If you came here to play a game, you don't want me for an antagonist. Six hours for whom?"

"You would like to know, no doubt," said Ninez, showing her teeth. "I did not intend to speak aloud, but since I have, I have nothing to take back. Yes; I promised to wait six hours, but I don't know that I ought to."

"Do as you please," said Richard.

He was still holding her wrist, and his eyes were looking sternly if not mercilessly into her face.

"I've seen thousands of women in my time, but none just like you," he went on. "I don't think you have an equal on the continent. There used to be a Signora Sandrol at Madison Square Garden, who had some of your blood, but she wasn't your counterpart. Now, quiet down and give me your story. You are no longer Gunnison Jessie, but Isa Estevan, and, I believe, the wife of Durango Diaz. Sit down, woman. I am human and not tiger."

Ninez made no resistance when the Centipede pushed her gently down upon the three-legged stool at the end of the table. He took the other one near by, and, after a brief pause, went on:

"I wish you would give me the whole story."

"About the Durango Diaz matter?" she asked.

"About everything," he said.

"That would take up the allotted six hours," she answered, with a smile.

"Tell it in two, then. I want to know all about you."

Ninez looked across the table into the eyes of the Broadway Centipede, but did not speak.

"Very well! If you do not speak, you may not leave this cabin when you wish," he said. "I am more than ever master of Camp Bonanza. Are you going to give me your history?"

A moment later a slight noise at the door drew Richard Redhilt's attention, and the next second he was on his feet.

"Great God! You?" he cried, seeing the man who had come in and closed the door.

"Why not, Richard Redhilt?" was the retort. "You need not draw where you stand. The hand in my pocket holds a revolver aimed at your heart. You will remember that the New York courts want you dead or alive. I am not very particular in what state you land in Gotham. Sit down. The lady will tell her story for both of us. I am the man who bargained with her concerning the six hours. What are you going to do, Richard? This is no doomed car on the Denver and Rio Grande Road, and Mormon Luke is not behind me this time!"

Richard looked madly at the speaker, who stood against the door talking coolly, and with no doubtful emphasis. How had this detective escaped from the round cavern where he had been left to perish with Bertha the Beautiful?

Captain Coldgrip was on deck again, with his Satanic coolness, and victory was looking from his eyes.

The Broadway Centipede came back toward the table.

"I'd give a thousand for Injun Nick just now," he said. "What has become of my red right bower?"

Captain Coldgrip saw the boss of the camp drop sullenly upon the stool from which his appearance had startled him.

"Tell your story," he said, with a glance at Ninez.

"All of it?"

"Just as you like."

The woman's gaze fell and she was silent for a moment.

"What's the use of it?" she suddenly exclaimed, springing up. "I am Isa Estevan—that is my real name. I ran away from home near Havana with a young Spanish officer named Castro. He died at Vera Cruz. I then married Durango Diaz, who won me with a lie about his wealth, when he was only a handsome muleteer and brigand. I left him in the City of Mexico. After that I became a wanderer and an adventuress. I know not whither I went. I came to Salt Lake at last. I met and married Mormon Luke after the Mormon ceremony. Do you want the particulars of these events?"

She glanced at the two men with a smile.

"There is a portion you have left out," said Captain Coldgrip, "but for my part I am willing it should be so."

"For God's sake don't force me to narrate it," said Ninez, paling. "You are not without mercy, if you are a hunter of men. The men I left a while ago wanted to try me for the murder of Durango Diaz. I killed that man. What do you say now, Richard Redhilt?"

"I wouldn't be astonished if you had killed a dozen men," was the answer. "It seems to me that you have had a career redder than the Red Sea."

"Man forced me to it!" exclaimed Ninez, with flashing eyes. "Captain Coldgrip, a little while ago I stood before you begging for the life of this man because he had caused the death-wounding of Mormon Luke. I told you that I would give you six hours for your last play. Three of them have not yet expired. I don't want that man now; I turn him over to you. I am going back."

"To Salt Lake?" asked the detective.

"To Cuba," was the quick reply. "The lost angel of the house of Estevan is going home. Camp Bonanza wants me, but I will not remain. I told Rincon Rob and pards that I would meet them to-morrow for trial, but that was a device to gain time. You and Richard Redhilt for it now. This is to be your last play, captain. You must handle the cards well to get that man to New York, two thousand miles away. Let Isa Estevan, alias Ninez, the Mormon, bid you farewell."

She went toward the door where Captain Coldgrip stood, and Richard saw him step aside to let her out.

The detective and the woman exchanged significant glances, and the latter opened the door and crossed the threshold.

All at once Richard Redhilt, whose eyes had followed her, saw her shrink back. The next moment she turned toward the interior of the cabin.

"The camp tigers are out, captain," she said, in low tones, to the New York detective. "Take care of the man before you and I will show them the temperature of Cuban blood."

Ninez stepped forward to the middle of the street, and in the twinkling of an eye flung up her hand.

"Halt!" she exclaimed, sternly, and four men as stalwart as Richard Redhilt stopped in a skiff of moonlight and clutched their revolvers tightly.

"Gentlemen, you could not wait, I see. You have resolved to avenge Durango Diaz before the morning comes. I am the woman you want. The hand that holds this six-shooter in your faces drove the dagger to Durango's heart. Richard Redhilt is busy now, and cannot see you. He does not wish to be disturbed. Since you have come for me, I am your prisoner."

Strange to say, Ninez stepped forward and suddenly lowered the revolver.

"I want to be tried immediately, and without Richard Redhilt being near," she went on lowering her voice. "You all believe that I have fascinated the boss of Camp Bonanza. Well, maybe I have. I am the slayer of Durango, I say. He was my husband, and that may make the crime greater in your eyes. Come! where do you hold court—under the tree from which you swung Diamond Dan?"

The four men could not conceal their surprise.

Could it be that Ninez had actually placed herself in their hands for trial and death? They did not know that Captain Coldgrip was facing the Centipede at that moment in the cabin.

They did not want Richard to be present at the trial. He had shielded the black-eyed siren before, and might do so again.

Rincon Bob reached out and took the woman's arm, but she jerked loose and gave him a flashing look.

"Don't touch me till I am condemned," she said. "If you stay here, Richard Redhilt will weaken and spoil the play you are anxious to make."

That seemed to start the pards of the secret camp.

"We'll give you fair play," said Rincon Rob. "Camp Bonanza never hanged a woman an' it doesn't want ter now unless—"

"Unless she is guilty, eh?" smiled Ninez.

"That's it," said three men at once.

A moment afterward the Utah siren was walking away with the desperadoes, and she smiled to herself when she thought how she had helped to secure to Captain Coldgrip his long-hunted prey.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SIREN SHOTS.

RINCON ROB and his pards conducted Ninez to that part of the camp where we have seen them end the career of Diamond Dan.

The woman kept her lips tightly closed, and made no reply to the questioning glances of the bronze men who had charge of her.

On the way the quartette of guards were joined by others, until the Mormones could look into the faces of nearly the entire population of the camp.

Rincon Bob led the crowd to the tree from which the New York sport had been launched into eternity despite Santa Fe Sam's efforts to adjust the deadly noose to his advantage.

Ninez had not been disarmed, and the revolver with which she had halted the four before Richard's cabin, was where her hand could speedily reach it.

"Hyer is ther camp's court o' justice," said Rincon Rob, turning sharply upon the woman.

Ninez glanced up and seemed to notice the stout boughs of the tree that stretched themselves toward the camp.

The men silently surrounded her, and the adventuress found herself in the center of a circle which, under any other circumstances, would not have meant a circle of death.

Her eyes still sparkled brilliantly, as if the effect of the Cuban wine had not been lost, but nobody could say that she was not herself.

Rincon Rob's announcement startled her slightly.

A court of justice! and the tree was undoubtedly the scaffold!

"If this is your court, I am ready for trial," said the beautiful Mormones.

"We don't have ter produce any proof—you have confessed," was the leader's reply. "You finished Durango Diaz, although you laughed at his dyin' accusation. You don't go back on thet confession, do you?"

"No!" said Ninez proudly. "I killed the Mexican as I had a right to. Let me tell you."

The men glanced at Rincon Rob, who stepped back and waited for the Mormones to proceed.

"That man entrapped me into the most infamous of marriages," she went on. "He made me believe that he was wealthy and a gentleman. I saw him only on certain days, and then he carried out the play he was making, deceiving me completely. After the ceremony, almost before the priest's words had ceased to sound in my ears, I discovered that Durango Diaz, instead of being what he represented, was a muleteer and a low robber—that he had even plundered churches and women. He left me before I could pay him as he deserved for his infamy. I would have killed him in Mexico if I could have laid hands on him, but his goddess of fortune kept him beyond my reach. When I found him here, my first impulse was to kill him, and you have seen how I heeded it."

"But did you kill him for that deception only?" asked Rincon Rob. "Were you not afraid he would expose you to Richard Redhilt?"

"He did!" said Ninez quickly. "He confessed ere he received my dagger that he had sent Richard a warning. I would have struck him all the same if he had not traced a word. That man's life belonged to me."

Ninez looked into the faces of the men as they were to be seen in the bright starlight, and tried to read their thoughts.

"This is only her story," suddenly said one of the group, and the woman's gaze instantly covered him. "She told Shingle Sim since sundown that she is a Cuban."

"That is true," cried Ninez. "I am Isa Estevan, but now Ninez the wife, or widow, of Mormon Luke."

"The man we shot on the mountain in mistake for Diamond Dan," said Rincon Rob. "Gents, the question is this. Shall this woman be convicted of the killing of Durango Diaz?"

"She has confessed," said half a dozen men.

"That is true. Now, what shall be the penalty?"

The Mormon queen looked at her judges with but little outward concern. She seemed to know that each was a woman-hater of the deepest dye, and that from them but little mercy could be expected.

Rincon Rob waited several moments for a reply to his last question but the pards stood silent in the starlight.

"Let's get through with this," suddenly exclaimed. "We don't want the captain to take a hand in this play. All in favor ov lettin' this woman go with the blood ov Durango on her hands, hold up your hands. Hands up, gents."

Ninez looked anxiously, but not a bronzed hand was lifted toward the stars.

Rincon Rob had but to put the other side of the question.

"All in favor ov ther death penalty hold up yer hands!" he said.

The reply was startling even to the stoical woman in the center of the circle, for twenty hands were suddenly raised.

"You see how the boys vote," the leader of the crowd said turning to Ninez. "You've had time to escape, but you would not take advan-

tage of it. You got into this trap by your own action. You can't blame the boys who, whatever he war in Mexico, call Durango a pard hyer."

"I expected no more than this," the Cuban beauty said between her white teeth. "The only law this tiger-camp knows is retaliation. It asks no questions when it wants blood; it cares not why its worst man was killed. *Sacrista!* you will raise Durango Diaz to a saintship if you can. Long live the muleteer thief of Camp Bonanza!"

The men about her ground their teeth at Ninez's sarcastic exclamation, and the circle suddenly contracted.

"We don't like women hyer—thet's a a good deal ov the secret!" exclaimed Rincon Rob. "We're a law unto ourselves, an' woe to the creature we condemn. What have you to say now, Ninez? Sentence has been passed, an' thar's nothin' ter do but ter execute it."

Already a coil of rope was dangling from the hands of a man near Rincon Rob, and his eyes told how eager he was to adjust the noose around the shapely throat of the Mormon queen.

All at once the woman sprung back and the suddenness of her move opened the circle behind her.

Rincon Rob sprung forward.

"Halt!" cried Ninez, and the hand that went up at the word clutched a revolver. "The pards of Camp Bonanza may condemn, but they cannot execute. Look into the revolver of Ninez, the Mormon, gentlemen of Colorado. The first man to advance will fall dead in his boots!"

A terrible silence followed these sternly-spoken words. The look of the woman was all the emphasis they needed; some of the Bonanza pards instinctively drew back.

For all this, it was a tableau that could not last long. The men before Ninez were not to be baffled by one revolver.

Not more than six feet separated the woman and the Mexican pard's avengers.

"You are quicker than she, Rincon," a voice whispered at Rincon Rob's ears.

Rincon Rob shut his teeth hard behind his big mustache and looked at Ninez.

"You don't expect ter get away, eh?" he said. "Camp Bonanza never lets any birds escape, and—"

The stalwart sport leaped straight at the woman, breaking his own sentence with a sudden oath.

Ninez recoiled, but her revolver did not drop. All at once a sharp shot rung out on the night air and a jet of fire leaped toward the crowd.

Rincon Rob fell back almost as quickly as he had darted forward, and half a dozen hands kept him from reaching the ground.

The Mormoness had again proved that she was a dangerous woman.

A dozen revolvers clicked before the white smoke that seemed to envelop the Cuban beauty. As many men started forward with their fingers at the deadly trigger, and all waited breathlessly for the smoke to clear away.

The evident intention was, as seen by the mien of the waiting desperadoes, to avenge the death of Rincon Rob without a second's parley.

The smoke lifted slowly, but a minute took it all away.

The dozen pards leaned forward eagerly; they threw up their hands and covered the spot where Ninez had been seen a moment before, but not a revolver spoke.

The Mormoness was gone!

For a full minute the pards of Camp Bonanza stood spellbound.

The woman had vanished as if by supernatural agency, and the disappointed sports saw only the vacancy she had just filled.

There was a moment's consultation, and then the hunt began, but it resulted in more disappointment and new oaths. One by one the hunters came back to the spot and renewed vows of vengeance when they looked down upon the magnificent man lying in the soft starlight with a dark spot between the black eyes, lately so full of fire.

Rincon Rob would never help to condemn another guest of Camp Bonanza, and his checkered career had ended before the flash of a woman's eyes.

"This is the woman the cap'n would defend," said the mad sport over the body of Rincon Rob. "Let's take Rincon back and show him her work. We needn't tell 'im that we war about ter noose her at ther time. We kin only say thet she shot Rincon dead, an' then ran like a deer."

The proposition was immediately received with favor. Six men lifted the corpse from the ground and started toward camp.

They bore it slowly down the main street, and reached the cabin lately occupied by Richard Redhilt.

The door was shut, and beyond the little window alongside all was dark.

"Shall we wake 'im?" asked the man, in whispers.

"Yes," said one, determinedly. "This is a case ov death."

The next moment a hand rapped on the door, but the sounds died away without any response.

"Open the door!" said some one.

A moment later the door was open, and a man was leaning across the threshold.

"Cap'n?" he called. "Cap'n Richard? We've got suthin' for yer eyes out hyer."

There was no answer.

"Somethin' 's happened, I say," exclaimed a man behind the speaker. "Ther cap'n sleeps like a cat, as we all know. Hyer, let me solve ther mystery. I've got a match in my hand now."

In a moment a little flame flashed up, and a stalwart sport sprung into the cabin. He was followed by half a dozen men like him.

"Look hyer! what does this mean?" suddenly exclaimed the man with the lucifer.

The sports of the camp stood still and looked over the speaker's hand.

The table was upset, and several broken bottles lay on the floor; near by lay the two stools, upside down.

Richard Redhilt was nowhere to be seen.

For several moments the crowd stared thunderstruck and speechless. Their eyes seemed ready to start from their heads.

"Who's been hyer?" suddenly exclaimed the match-holder, facing his amazed companions. "Thar's but one man who holds a grudge ag'in' ther cap'n, but it can't hev been him!"

"Who's that, Shingle Sim?"

"Cap'n Coldgrip!"

One-half of the crowd laughed; the other half looked serious. The proprietor of the liquor cabin was one of the serious ones.

"Thar's been a tussle hyer," he said when the Centipede's lamp had been lit. "Ther cap'n is ther best man in Colorado, unless it be that devil with ther bloodless hand. Cap'n Coldgrip is ther only man who wants Richard Redhilt, ov Camp Bonanza. We must solve this mystery. Ther cap'n is gone, an' ther condition ov things hyer shows thet he didn't go away ov his own accord. He went with ther person who came while we war tryin' ter hang ther Cleopatra from Mormonism. If Cap'n Coldgrip came, he shall hev Bonanza at his heels. It is more than two thousand miles ter New York. Cap'n Dick shall never enter in ther hands ov the man o' ther bloodless grip!"

The crowd uttered a wild shout, confirmatory of Shingle Sim's emphatic remark.

"Jehosophat! hyer comes ther man for ther emergency!" just then cried somebody on the outside of the crowd. "Make way for ther devil in red!"

In an instant the door was cleared, and with a cry that startled even the stern ruffians of the camp, a man bounded into the cabin.

Shingle Sim and his closest companions drew back and looked at him.

"Injun Nick!" several voices said, but the speakers seemed to doubt it themselves.

The man who had come was undoubtedly an Indian; he had the herculean figure of Richard Redhilt's famous pard, but in feature he no longer looked like Injun Nick.

The eyes that blazed like a madman's seemed to soften into intellectuality, as he gazed at the condition of things in the cabin. All at once he looked into Shingle Sim's face.

"Gone?" he said.

"Cap'n Coldgrip!" was the answer.

With a wolfish cry the Indian sprung away, and a red sleuth was on the detective's trail!

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DETECTIVE'S BIG PLAY.

LET us retrace our steps, reader, and see what had happened in Richard Redhilt's cabin.

It will be remembered that when Ninez the Mormoness put herself into the power of Rincon Rob and his pards, she left Captain Coldgrip and the Broadway Centipede face to face.

The woman had managed her own capture in a manner which had allowed the detective to retain the advantage he had secured, and when the camp sports had marched her away for trial, they did not dream of the tableau in the shanty.

Richard heard his league beyond the cabin door, but the detective stood between him and his men, and a pair of eyes that would spare not were fastened upon him.

He wondered by what means Captain Coldgrip had escaped from the cavern reached by the secret passages of Satan's throat gulch. He knew nothing of the adventures we have already witnessed and described—Injun Nick's coming, the duel underground, and Silver Silas's arrival after the battle.

It was enough to see the New York spotter before him once more. He had left him last disguised as the man from Tinaja, but he had come back in his real character, that is Captain Coldgrip the oath-bound detective.

The Centipede heard Rincon Rob and his companions take their departure, and he knew that Ninez had placed herself in their hands.

What did the woman mean?

Although he now knew that she was a different person than Gunnison Jessie, and that she had killed Durango Diaz who was her husband, he could not think why she had put herself in the clutches of a lot of men who wanted her blood.

With the departure of the gang went out

the Centipede's hopes of assistance. He now had to face Captain Coldgrip alone.

"I don't think you were looking for me?" suddenly said the detective, and a smile rested at the corners of his mouth as he spoke.

"I confess I wasn't," was the answer.

"I've always had a faculty of turning up when I'm not wanted. The man from Tinaja has disappeared, Richard, and Claude Coldgrip from the East has taken his place."

Richard Redhilt bit his lip as the deception, so cleverly practiced, was thrown into his teeth.

"We will let the Mormon siren go," continued the detective. "She has fallen into the hands of your band, but she is able to take care of herself. Let us come down to business, Richard. I am here for you."

Richard Redhilt seemed to increase in stature as if the last sentence was a challenge to fight.

"You have two revolvers on your person," the detective went on and his hand crept from his pocket and covered the Centipede with a silver-mounted six-shooter. "Take them out one by one and toss them over your shoulder into the corner behind you!"

This was a command that maddened the mountain sport; but he beat his anger down and sullenly obeyed it.

"Your bowie now, Richard," said Coldgrip, coolly.

"I am to be shot dead unarmed, I presume," he grated, as he drew his knife and threw it after the revolvers.

"Not that bad, I hope," smiled the detective, advancing toward the man at the table whom he looked steadily in the eye. "I remember that once before I took you from camp to be baffled by a railroad accident. That interference of fate in your behalf, Richard, is not to be repeated."

The two men were hardly three feet apart when these words were spoken, and if there had been a witness he would have been struck by their physical equality.

All at once the left hand of Captain Coldgrip darted forward and closed on Richard Redhilt's shoulder, and the hunter sport saw the revolver creep closer to his face. A brace of gleaming eyes were behind it.

"I could kill you where you stand, Richard, and send you to New York by Express," he said, in low tones. "There is a reward of five thousand dollars for you dead or alive, but that is not what has thrown me upon this trail."

"Oh, yes—I know," said the Centipede. "You swore over a certain corpse and while you held a little girl in your arms, that you would find me. That is all known, Captain Coldgrip. You need not repeat the oath."

"It is not to be repeated," was the answer. "I am here to say, that the red hound—Injun Nick—who has followed you for two years will no more step between me and my legitimate prey."

"What is that?" asked Richard, with a sudden start. "Have you encountered that Injun Nick?"

A flash of victory lit up the detective's eyes.

"The hand that covers you had the honor to feel his windpipe," he said. "I know it did it once before between Alabaster City and Gold Eye, but the trees that grew from the thousand-foot wall saved his life. This time I left him at the foot of the wall of the round cave and I looked into his face after the hand-to-hand duel. You have told me that Injun Nick has as many lives as a cat, but this time I think he lost them all."

"I don't know," said Richard. "That Indian is one of the mysteries of physiology. I have seen him choked, and lie as one dead for hours. At his own request, I have throttled him fifty times, but then I don't claim to have a hand without blood and as cold as ice."

"I'll go bail if that red-skin recovers from the last grip I gave him," laughed Captain Coldgrip. "Now, let us go, Richard. This time I won't have to march you to the stables for a horse. Everything has been prepared for this swoop."

Richard Redhilt looked astonished, but made no reply.

He was in the detective's hands for the second time, and there was to be no railroad rescue and no salvation by the banded pards of Camp Bonanza.

"I shall kick this table over, captain, and the stools also," the New York spotter went on, suiting action to words as he spoke. "I will also blow out the light, so that when the camp-wolves want their leader they will find that he has gone away against his will."

Captain Coldgrip took his man to the door of the cabin, and tightened his grip on his arm.

"This game is in dead earnest," he said, looking into Richard's face. "We are going to quit Camp Bonanza quietly, if you will permit it, but if you want a scene, you have but to give a signal, or lift your voice. You may have your choice of going to New York in a palace car or in an oblong box."

A proud smile curled the desperado's lips, and it was evident that going back to New York was furthest from his mind at that moment.

Camp Bonanza seemed entirely deserted, and the two men may have wondered at the same

time what was passing between Ninez and the twenty pards.

Captain Coldgrip never took his eyes from the man who walked beside him seemingly without compulsion. A cocked six-shooter touched his breast, and his finger resting lightly on the trigger told that it was ready for the bloodiest work.

Nobody followed the two men, and no one seemed to have witnessed the cool capture of the camp alcalde.

Was Captain Coldgrip to be permitted to take his man away without a struggle? Was the game of two years to end tamely in Camp Bonanza, and Richard Redhilt, thug, alcalde and sport, to go quietly back to the scene of his one great crime?

Captain Coldgrip took his man through the grouped shanties and to the mountain trail, which was more than usually well lighted by multitudes of stars.

All at once a figure sprang into the trail, and Richard heard an exclamation of joy.

The captured alcalde leaned forward with an eagerness he could not control.

"Is it you?" he hissed, gazing into the face before him. "I thought we hanged you long ago, Silver Silas!"

"So you did, Richard," smiled the young man; "but, thanks to Santa Fe Sam, who adjusted the noose, I am here to congratulate Captain Coldgrip on his success."

The Broadway Centipede drew back and said nothing; but for several moments he gave the youth some hard glances.

"The horses, Silas," said the detective, and Silver Silas disappeared for a moment, and then led three horses forward.

"This means that I am to be taken to some station and thrown bound into the cars," grated the Centipede at sight of the steeds.

He drew back again as he spoke, his brow darkened, and the scar on his cheek grew livid.

"It means New York and a scaffold in the Tombs," he went on. "I have sworn that I would never go back. I have laughed when I was told that this man, Captain Coldgrip, was on my trail. He has me for the second time. By the gods of the ages! I won't start on this journey."

Silver Silas led the horses up, and was looking at the man he served—the Gotham Vidocq.

"I don't go to Gotham!" suddenly rung from Richard Redhilt's lips, and the next instant he sprang back, freed in a flash from the detective's grip.

It was the work of less than the tenth part of a second, and Richard's last emphatic word had the ring of triumph.

Captain Coldgrip lost neither presence of mind nor his cool courage by this unexpected coup. He was a man who never lost his head.

He leaped at Richard before the sport could turn his sudden action into account. He covered the space between by a tiger's spring and before Silver Silas, the sole spectator, could realize that Richard had made a break for liberty, the two men met.

"In a palace-car or an oblong box, Richard!" exclaimed Captain Coldgrip, closing with the man who had given him such a long chase.

"Then, by Heaven! in the box!" was the grated reply, and Silver Silas saw the two men grapple in the starlight.

He did not know that Richard Redhilt was unarmed, nor did he notice that the detective had dropped his revolver with the spring.

Silver Silas let go the bridles of the three horses and flew to Captain Coldgrip's assistance.

"Never mind. I'm enough for the Centipede despite his stings!" said a triumphant voice as the youth reached the two men, and the New York spotter rose with a man hanging, as it were, from his right hand.

"Bring up the horses," said Captain Coldgrip. "I don't know but that Richard Redhilt will go East in a box after all. If he does, it was by his own choosing."

Silver Silas brought the three steeds forward, and the detective dragged the limp body of the Broadway Centipede toward one of the animals.

"Where is Bertha?" he asked.

"Here," said a silvery voice, and Captain Coldgrip looked up into the face of a young girl who had ridden up, and was looking down into his eyes from the saddle. "Merciful heaven!" she went on, "you have disobeyed my command, captain. Richard Redhilt is dead!"

"Dead to Camp Bonanza, nothing worse," laughed the detective. "I think we are at the door from which can be seen the end of this long hunt for one man."

"Thank fortune for that!" ejaculated Bertha, the Beautiful.

In a little while one of the horses was given a rider who hung heavily over the saddle; a man who was stalwart, handsome, and unconscious.

The command to start was about to drop from Captain Coldgrip's tongue when the whip-like crack of a revolver saluted the ears of all.

It came from the mountain suburbs of the

camp, and the detective turned toward Silver Silas with a smile.

"A life went out then—a thousand to one on that," he said, and then the occupants of three of the saddles listened intently.

"It was Ninez's revolver that spoke," continued the detective. "The voices up yonder tell me that she has eluded the pards of Camp Bonanza. We don't want to encounter them, and Ninez must fight her own battles. We have the prize of the game in our hands. After more than two years I can look into your face, Richard Redhilt, and feel assured of victory!"

Captain Coldgrip leaned forward and looked at his prisoner, and not once thought of Injun Nick.

CHAPTER XXXII.

INJUN NICK'S HUNT.

THAT same night a single horseman left Camp Bonanza, and rode north as rapidly as a lithe-limbed steed could carry him.

His skin was dark and his eyes possessed a vivid light; he rode like a person who was used to the saddle, and the horse seemed to know that he was carrying his rider on an important journey, for he stretched away with all his might.

We will not follow this rider all the time to the end of his journey.

Suffice it to say that it lasted all night and longer; that daylight when it came found him still flying over the mountain trail, and that the sun saw the face of an Indian—an Indian in civilized garb.

It was night again when this determined man in red entered a telegraph-office attached to a small depot on the main line of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, and indited a dispatch to the operator at a place called Bee-line City, some miles west.

The message read thus:

"OPERATOR:—

"Did three men and a young girl, one of the men evidently a prisoner, take the east-bound train, now under way, at Bee-line City? Answer, care of operator here."

This dispatch was flashed over the wires, and the Indian, whose horse awaited him near the depot, waited for the return.

He walked out into the open air, and uttered several exclamations of triumph.

Thus far events were moving to suit him, and he seemed to feel that his long ride from Camp Bonanza had not been for nothing.

When he went back into the telegraph-room the operator was taking a message.

"This is your answer," he said to the Indian, who sprang forward and waited.

The return message was brief enough to require but a moment to jot it down, and the eyes of the eager red-man read the single line it made:

"The parties named are on the train."

A new gleam appeared in the depths of his dark eyes.

"Does the train stop here?" he asked the operator.

"Not to-night. Bee-line City will have to grow before she can catch all the trains."

The Indian paid for the messages and bade the operator good-night.

He went out, and led his horse toward a light that shone in several windows, from which came sounds of music and boisterous voices.

"I have three hours on hand," he said to himself. "I might as well look at Bee-line in motion as to pass them in the mountains."

He left his horse near the door of a large frame building and entered.

Bee-line City was "in motion," for the Indian found himself in a large and well-lighted room where a dance was in progress.

Bronze men and women were mingled promiscuously on the floor, and the musical tones of a cracked violin were stirring them to wild gyrations.

A counter at one end of the place was doing a good business, and it did not take the keen eyes of the Indian long to see that the motley crowd was more or less intoxicated.

Nobody appeared to notice the new arrival, or, if he was seen, no note was made of him.

Injun Nick—let us call him by his right name—glanced over the crowd and seemed to single out a certain man. He was dancing with a large woman with very black eyes, but the moment he saw Injun Nick he lost all interest in the dance.

"I wonder what fetches that Indian hyer," the man thus singled out said to himself. "He surely can't know what I've done. By Jupiter! I don't like to see him hyer, especially since I'm the man what led Captain Coldgrip to the gulch whar Richard and the Injun always disappeared when I follered 'em. I've still got the two thousand-dollar check the captain gave me for thet sarvice, an' I intend ter go on ter Denver tomorrow an' get it cashed. No, Injun Nick, Santa Fe Sam don't like ter see you hyer."

Injun Nick suddenly advanced across the room to the bar. The traitor tough drew back and watched him. He did not appear to see Santa Fe Sam now.

There was a vacant place at the counter when

the red-skin drew up, and the next moment he had taken and paid for a drink.

"Excuse me," said Santa Fe Sam to his dark-eyed companion. "I will join you again in a minute." And before the woman could reply he was walking straight toward the door as if an uncontrollable eagerness impelled him.

If he had cast one look over his shoulder he would have seen that he was followed by the very man he wanted to avoid—Injun Nick.

The meeting of the two men had been wholly accidental, but the Centipede's red right bower was ready for a startling play.

Santa Fe Sam reached the door in safety, as he thought, and he grated madly as he sprang out into the night:

"By Jehosaphat I'm in luck to get away from the red rattler so easy."

The last words had hardly left his tongue when a slight noise in his rear attracted his attention, and he was turning on his heel when a man landed at his side.

Santa Fe Sam recoiled with a startled cry, for a tiger was in the eyes before him.

"Don't run away," said the Indian, a stern smile at the corners of his mouth. "I have found the dog who betrayed the secret of Satan's Throat. What ought I to do with you, Santa Fe Sam?"

The traitor tough of Camp Bonanza could make no reply. He felt that Injun Nick had already decided his fate, for he knew the character of the man who was Richard Redhilt's right bower.

"The hand of Injun Nick had already closed on the tough's shoulder, and he was waiting for an answer with blazing eyes.

Santa Fe Sam saw the desperateness of his case, and his teeth became set when he looked the red-skin over from head to foot.

"It's death if I submit, an' ther same, mebbe, if I make a break," he said to himself. "A man kin pass in his chips at death's counter but once, so what's ther difference?"

The next instant he threw his hands up and caught the Indian's arm. In the droop of an eye-lash the hand on his shoulder was loosened, and he sprang back with a bowie in his hand!

Injun Nick uttered no cry. He simply rushed at Santa Fe Sam, beat down the uplifted arm, and raised him from the ground before he could get in the initial stroke. He appeared like a thunderbolt to the man from Camp Bonanza.

"I'll start you back to your woman, Santa Fe," ejaculated the Indian, turning toward the dance-hall with the tough in his grip. One hand had a hold at Santa Fe Sam's throat, the other clutched his belt.

Injun Nick, strong as a giant, had an acrobat's agility. He took a sudden spring toward the wooden shanty, but halted within five feet of the door, and raised the rough above his head.

The next moment he threw him forward with all the force he had at his command, and Santa Fe Sam struck the heavy front of the building with a crash!

The inmates might have heard the noise if the dance had not been at its height; the crazy violin and the shouts of the drunken crowd drowned the concussion!

It was a terrible collision! Injun Nick had thrown Santa Fe Sam head-foremost against the house, and he saw him sink to the ground like a corpse.

He went forward and bent over his victim.

The eyes of the red rattler were full of triumph.

He almost touched Santa Fe Sam's face during the inspection he made. He felt the neck and smiled; then he went through the dead man's pockets.

It was the work of two minutes, but Injun Nick found something that made his eyes laugh when he coolly examined it in the light of the lamp that hung above the door of the ranch.

He had taken from Santa Fe Sam's pockets a bit of paper which read as follows:

"First National Bank, Denver:—

"Pay to the bearer the sum of two thousand dollars
"CLAUDE COLDGRIP."

"Thanks, captain," said the Indian; "the bearer will present your check and fleece some monte bank with your money. By the wings of Gabriel! I didn't miss it when I entered Bee-line's plague-spot. I wasn't looking for Santa Fe Sam the traitor, but my net is always set for fish."

He hid the check in his bosom, glanced down at the dead man whose life had ended so thrillingly, and turned his back on the wild resort.

Injun Nick walked to his horse and threw himself into the saddle again.

He had not occupied much time since quitting the telegraph office at the railroad, but he did not deem it wise to remain in Bee-line.

He rode slowly toward the confines of the place and was lost to sight among the shadows of a very narrow trail.

Not long afterward a man might have been seen piling a quantity of dry wood upon the railroad track six miles from Bee-line City. He worked like a person with some powerful purpose and the stars alone saw that it was Injun Nick.

More than once he stopped and put an ear against the rail. He was waiting for the sound of a train from the West.

At last the Indian applied a match to the pile of wood on the track, and in a short time the long flames were leaping skyward.

By and by came the rumble of a train and the Indian left his fire and crouched in the dense shadows of a heap of bowlders near by.

Seconds seemed hours to the red-skin.

The fire on the track was not large enough to stop an impetuous engineer, but there was a chance that the train would slow up near where Injun Nick had hid his body among the rocks.

On, on came the train with its flashing headlight and demon roar.

The fire took a sudden spurt as if to further the red-skin's scheme, and he waited like a hunter with a deer on its way to his trap.

All at once the shriek of the engine awoke the echoes of the mountain, and the train checked its speed.

Nearer and nearer it came. Injun Nick could see the engineer leaning from his box with eyes fastened on the flaming obstruction on the track.

The dry wood had burned almost down, so that the train could dash through it without injury.

The Indian saw this and crept toward the nearest car which was moving slowly along.

The engineer would not stop; he had already discovered that he could "shoot" the fire.

Suddenly the whistle sounded again, the throttle was opened, and the train took a new start.

At that moment a dark figure caught hold of an iron and swung itself upon the steps.

It had the agility of an ape, and did not look unlike one in the uncertain light.

The next minute the train was making up lost time, and the Indian's fire had faded in the distance; but Injun Nick himself was on the train that carried Captain Coldgrip and his prisoner.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A TIGER IN A PALACE CAR.

THE night train that carried the most important characters of our romance swung around the mountain curves and shot through the gloomy gorges.

Every now and then the echoes of the wild country were awakened by the shriek of the locomotive. There seemed to be a demon of death at the throttle valve.

For some minutes Injun Nick remained on the platform of the car he had boarded, a dark animal-like object seen by no one.

At last he rose and opened the door.

The next minute he was inside and occupied a seat, into which he had dropped unnoticed.

The Broadway Centipede's red pard felt himself near his prey, but he did not let the assurance unsteady his nerves. He had a desperate play to make, and the last one in the game, he thought.

For sometime the red-skin gave the few passengers in the coach the benefit of his keen eyes; he singled them out and scrutinized each with the look of a lynx.

"Not here," he said to himself. "I must take the back track."

As he had swung himself upon the smoking-car, he was forced to look elsewhere for Captain Coldgrip and his prisoner.

He went back to the next car with his hat crushed over his eyes, but he saw everything all the same.

After that, the third coach with the same result, and then the tireless Indian found himself confronted by the first sleeper. The obstacles ahead did not daunt him in the least. He had killed one man that night; he was bound to rescue Richard Redhilt and cross arms for the last time with the New York detective.

He knew he could not get into the sleeper without securing a berth. If there should be no empty ones, he would have to wait till morning.

There was nothing about the Indian save his dark skin that disagreeably impressed any one. He was well dressed, and, for a savage, strikingly good-looking, clean enough, from all outward appearances, to occupy the berth of a palace car.

He did not begin to operate until the train drew up at Puebla.

Then he swung himself upon the ground, walked into the ticket office, and bought a first-class ticket for Atchison.

Thus armed, he went back to the car and waited for the train to get in motion again.

Five minutes later he appeared suddenly to a drowsy porter of the sleeper, and inquired for the conductor.

That individual was hunted up, and Injun Nick asked about the berths.

"We have two empty ones in this car," said the conductor, showing the diagram. "The center one here is between one occupied by a young lady and a man going East in manacles."

Injun Nick caught his breath, but did not betray the importance of his discovery.

"I'll take the center berth," he said. "The man in irons won't rob me, I know," was added with a smile.

In a little while from that time, the red pard

of Colorado and New York was behind the curtains of his berth. Despite the noise and tremor made by the flying train, a perfect silence seemed to envelop him.

For a few minutes he lay still.

He would have bet his head that Richard Redhilt was just before him, for a peculiar boot on the floor of the car had told him as much.

The curtained berth opposite might contain Captain Coldgrip, or Silver Silas, but he did not know.

Injun Nick laid a dozen plans and abandoned all as the train bore him along.

He let an hour slip by before he stirred.

Everybody seemed asleep in the car. He wondered if the Centipede was dreaming the fleeting miles away.

"Here goes for life or death!" he suddenly said to himself. "Now Injun Nick is going to make a play for the captain. Stand back, rattlers, and see how it spins."

He glided from his bunk and crept forward behind the long curtains. His red hand stole on in advance till he found the berth above the boots his keen eyes had noticed. That hand had the movement of the serpent.

The Indian found the edge of the bunk, and his hand crept over it toward the sleeper who occupied it.

For a little while his fingers moved hither and thither until they touched something that was not flesh.

Injun Nick knew what he had found in an instant. His hunt had ended at Richard Redhilt and he had touched the manacles with which Captain Coldgrip had secured his man.

The red-skin drew himself forward to the bunk; he allowed his fingers to press a human wrist three times in succession, and a responsive movement told him that the manacled man was awake.

He was wide awake and his heart was beating fast.

Richard Redhilt's sleep was of the lightest kind, and the first touch of his red pard's hand had broken it.

He could not believe that Injun Nick was at hand until the red fingers had given the grip. Then his heart seemed to stand still.

The next minute he felt the presence of a face in his berth.

"Where is he?" whispered the Indian.

"He is across the aisle—he and Silver Silas; the girl is behind me," was the answer.

"Injun Nick is hot on the trail," said the dangerous red-skin. "He is here to take Richard from the grip of the bloodless hand."

"You'll have to play it almighty fine," was the response. "I am manacled to my berth, and Captain Coldgrip has the key!"

Injun Nick was silent for a moment.

"Is his berth the upper one?" he asked.

"No; Silver Silas sleeps there."

Richard Redhilt felt a hand feel his manacles and then creep down the chain to where it was locked in a peculiar manner to the polished wood of the berth.

What would the Indian do next?

"I will get the key," he said, in a whisper of terrible sternness. "Injun Nick will let nothing beat him to-night."

The hand was withdrawn, and the Broadway Centipede dropped to the floor.

It was highly important that Captain Coldgrip should be awake during moments like these. He had ceased to think of the man he had left for dead on the floor of the cavern in Satan's Throat, and with Richard Redhilt manacled to his berth, he had a right to dream of final triumph in New York.

Injun Nick had to have the key before he could liberate his master, and that key he now knew was in Captain Coldgrip's possession.

All at once he crossed the narrow aisle and parted the curtains of the detective's sleeping apartment.

The long blade of a flat-handled bowie lay along the Indian's sleeve, and a tiger looked from his eyes.

He looked in upon the man lying in the lower berth, and the lamp hanging near showed him the features of the New York spotter.

The fox was asleep at last, and Injun Nick saw Captain Coldgrip the man who had throttled him twice, at his mercy. His fingers got a tighter grip on the bowie without effort; he leaned over and listened. The detective was sound asleep.

To lift his hand and send the blade home was the work of a second. There need be no noise; the Indian knew how it was done.

Suddenly, Injun Nick lifted his hand and shut his lips close.

"Followed from New York, and hunted from pillar to post!" he grated. "You have trailed with an oath the man called Richard Redhilt, captain. You found him at Gold Eye, took him away and lost him. You found him again at Camp Bonanza. He is your prisoner now, going back to the big city to stretch hemp in the Tombs, at least you think he is, captain. Why don't you watch for Injun Nick? Oh, is it because you held the lamp close to his eyes, after the duel underground, and pronounced him dead? Aha! you do not know that he can be choked fifty times a day and not be killed? It

is a trick not known by two men in a million. I think I will show you one now."

At that moment the engine's whistle signaled a station.

"Sawdust Bar," murmured the Indian as he listened.

The next instant he started back, for Captain Coldgrip, wide awake, was looking him in the face!

It was enough to lift the Indian off his feet!

"You here on the train!" ejaculated the detective, and before Injun Nick could deal a lightning blow he found himself in the grip of the bloodless hand again!

It was like the springing of a trap, so terribly sudden was the change.

Injun Nick went backward dragging the curtain after him, and the detective tugging at his throat, was making the last fight for success.

In a moment the quiet car had been transformed into a battle-ground!

"It is for life or death," grated the Indian, and with all the strength at his command he forced Captain Coldgrip back, tore his hands loose, and crushed him against the berth as if he would break him in twain!

A dozen devils seemed to possess the Centipede's red right bower.

He heard a cry behind him and knew that Bertha had been aroused, but he had no time to look at the beautiful stake of the game.

He had lost his bowie in the struggle and did not know where it was, therefore he had to depend on his powerful hands. Captain Coldgrip had been thrown with terrible violence against the board of the berth. He felt that the Indian had almost won the game.

Again and again Injun Nick with a tiger's power crunched his adversary back into the berth. He heard noises behind him which told that the car would soon be awake, and give him a brush against odds.

The key to Richard's chains was still missing. It had to remain so.

All at once the Indian left the detective.

He turned about and sprung toward his master.

"Where's the chain?" leaped from his throat, and then he caught it in his red hands and with the strength of a Hercules broke it from the wood to which it was fastened!

Richard Redhilt sprung into the aisle and was pushed by the Indian toward the forward end of the car. The whole train was slowing up again—Sawdust Bar!

Injun Nick had the awakened passengers before him. He whipped out two revolvers and thrust them into their faces.

"Forward!" he said to Richard Redhilt, over his shoulder. "The last trick is ours. They must not sleep who would beat the Scarlet Hercules!"

The Broadway Centipede unable to take part in the thrilling play, for his manacles, moved down the aisle. Injun Nick, erect and triumphant, covered the retreat with the cocked revolvers.

Suddenly a loud report rung through the car, and a jet of flame leaped from between the curtains of Captain Coldgrip's berth.

It was followed by a piercing cry, and the backward tumble of a stalwart man.

Injun Nick?

No; the man behind the red-skin had received the shot, and it was Richard Redhilt who dropped within ten feet of the door!

Out of the white smoke that rolled from behind the curtain leaped the New York detective and straight at his old enemy.

He reached Injun Nick before that worthy could cover him.

"I'm no infant with the last cards, Injun Nick!" he shouted, as both his hands closed on the throat of the red desperado. "If Richard goes to New York in a box, you shall go there in a palace car!"

There was a brief struggle, but the bloodless hand had the advantage now. The man who gripped the Indian seemed to possess the strength of half a dozen athletes; he did not need the assistance tendered when he had won the victory.

Captain Coldgrip smiled when he manacled a pair of dark-red hands.

The last play had been made, and the detective had won it!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

PLAYED OUT.

AT the close of our somewhat thrilling story of the New York spotter's man-hunt, we suddenly bridge space and transport the reader to the great metropolis.

We have but to tell him here that Captain Coldgrip landed his prisoners safely, Richard Redhilt suffering from a shot received in the sleeping-car during the attempt at rescue, and Injun Nick silent and defiant.

The tireless sleuth-hound presented himself one morning unannounced to a certain dignified gentleman who occupied the private office of the chief of police.

"Where's your man, captain? I see you are alone," said the official, smiling.

The detective smiled.

"Richard Redhilt, *alias* Robert Roy, the Broadway Centipede, is in the hospital ward of the Tombs; and his old friend, Injun Nick, *alias* the Scarlet Hercules of the Madison Square Garden, is in the same pleasant retreat."

The chief almost sprung from his chair.

"We had given you up," he said. "Once we had a report that you had turned sport in laced jacket and gold buttons."

"So I did," said the detective. "I played sport some time in the far West, but I threw off my fine toggery the moment I found my man. Diamond Dan was hanged in Camp Bonanza, and the last seen of Luke Logan, the Mormon Spider, the third man wanted here, he was riding toward Gunnison with a big wound in his breast. The court can now deal with the Centipede for the murder by which he orphaned Bertha Bethol, who came back with me. I shot the rascal during an attack on me in the sleeping-car, but I took good care only to wing him."

At the time of Captain Coldgrip's report, a stalwart Indian in citizen's clothes was pacing a cell within the Tombs prison.

It was Injun Nick.

"You have won this game, Captain Coldgrip, but look out for the next one!" he suddenly said, as his dark eyes became illuminated with rage. "These white fellows can't hold me, or at least they can't hang me with the same rope with which they may hang Captain Richard. Injun Nick will get out of here to shuffle a death deck for the man with the cold right hand!"

The capture and trial of Richard Redhilt became one of the sensations of New York, and Captain Coldgrip told the story of his cool and hazardous hunt to a spellbound crowd.

The verdict was not unexpected.

It was death by hanging, and Bertha the Beautiful felt that the death of her parents was to be avenged.

Meanwhile, Ninez had turned up in Salt Lake, but Mormon Luke was not to be found.

The Mormoness had successfully eluded the lynchers of Camp Bonanza, and the infuriated crowd had to curse her without making her feel their power.

What had become of Mormon Luke?

The question was not solved, strange to say, till the very day that saw Richard Redhilt officially strangled in New York.

Then a woman, who had been seen for several days among the mountains between Camp Bonanza and Gunnison, came upon a human skeleton in a deep valley, and a sudden cry from her lips proclaimed that she had made a discovery.

The woman was Ninez, who had been trying to solve the mystery connected with the disappearance of her Mormon lord, and a revolver with the letters "L. L." engraved on its silver mountings, told her to whom the grinning skeleton belonged.

In the hidden valley, some distance from the trail, the Mormon Spider had died miserably, and alone, and justice was satisfied.

He was the man who first suggested the crime committed two years before by Richard Redhilt, and, but for the death-wound received at Camp Bonanza, he might have perished with his hired assassin, on the scaffold.

A few days after the finding of the skeleton, which the huntress buried with her own hands, Ninez the Mormon came back to Salt Lake, only to disappear a week later.

Nobody saw her go, and none knew whither she went.

We may suppose that she went back to Cuba—back to the Estevan estate, which she had left to become, as we have seen, an adventuress, siren and murderess.

Silver Silas, the young man who has figured somewhat prominently at some stages of our romance, accompanied Bertha to New York, and after a short courtship, led her to the altar.

Captain Coldgrip gave the bride away, and the wedding was made interesting by some of the attending circumstances.

It was not until a few days before the happy event that Silver Silas opened the locket which, as the reader will recall, he took from the neck of Injun Nick, after the duel in the subterranean cavern in Satan's Throat Gulch.

The gold case was found to be filled with papers covered with many irregular lines and figures, and beneath them all was the portrait of a dark-faced beauty, whose features at once attracted Silas and his friend the detective.

"Injun Nick's hatred of women is plain to me now!" exclaimed the young man, with a laugh. "This is the person who is responsible for it. I will bet my head she once jilted the rattlesnake in red."

"Doubtless," said Captain Coldgrip, glancing up from the paper. "I believe I see the first gleams of light on an old mystery."

"Among those hieroglyphics?" cried Silver Silas.

"Yes. But I cannot say for certain. One of these days I may tell you a strange story, and we, together with what I hold in my hands, might be able to connect Injun Nick with it. But, pshaw! what am I talking about? I don't want any more long hunts for money or man. You and Bertha are happy, Silas; so am I.

We have avenged the murder of her parents and I have fulfilled my oath. What more can we ask?" and Captain Coldgrip lit a cigar and lost himself in the fleecy smoke.

He had accomplished a great work and could afford to congratulate himself.

The shrewdness of Richard Redhilt and the coolness of his banded pard had failed to outwit him. The trio who had orphaned Bertha for booty and beauty had perished one by one in the camp, and the trail, and in the great city.

But Injun Nick? asks the reader.

One morning several weeks after the death of the Broadway Centipede, Silver Silas broke into Captain Coldgrip's room. His face was white.

"Injun Nick escaped last night!" he said, to the detective.

Captain Coldgrip only removed his cigar and smiled.

"If that is the case," he said, coolly, "we shall probably meet again."

THE END.

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